

ANTI-COVENANT

Counter-Reading Women's Lives
in the Hebrew Bible

edited by
Mieke Bal





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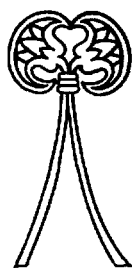
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CONTENTS

Preface	7
List of Contributors	9
Introduction	
Mieke Bal	11
I. The Legacy of Abraham:	
Dubious Male Dominance and Female Autonomy	25
1. The Legacy of Abraham	
Carol Delaney	27
2. Anti-Covenant	
Ann Marmesh	43
II. Until I Arose: The Effect of Effective Women	59
3. Desire and Danger: The Drama of Betrayal	
Betsy Merideth	61
4. Deborah the Woman Warrior	
Rachel C. Rasmussen	79
5. Narrative Theory, Ideology,	
and Transformation in Judges 4	
Stephen Hanselman	95
6. Constructions of Woman in Readings	
of the Story of Deborah	
Jane Shaw	113
III. Commemorating the Dead:	
Sacrificed Women and Readings of Revenge	133
7. Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy:	
Between Rape and Seduction	
Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes	135
8. An Ideology of Expendability:	
Virgin Daughter Sacrifice	
Anne Michele Tapp	157

9. A Ritual Processed	
Beth Gerstein	175
10. Pseudo-Philo and the Transformation of Jephthah's Daughter	
Cynthia Baker	195
11. Between Altar and Wondering Rock: Toward a Feminist Philology	
Mieke Bal	211
Bibliography	233

PREFACE

During the academic year 1985-1986 I was visiting at the Harvard Divinity School. Immediately upon arrival I was invited to the meeting of the Women's Caucus, on Wednesday morning at 8 a.m. Although tired, I went, and never regretted it: it is there that I met with almost all the authors who contribute to this volume. During the second semester, we met weekly to discuss Hebrew Bible narratives and the ways they have been, and still are, read by our culture. We realized how the stories changed while the culture took shape, and how the readers did as much violence to the stories as the stories, through their use as exempla, did to the culture. This interaction became the focus of our discussions.

The topic of interaction between text and readership centered around the ideologies of gender, an issue which is acutely relevant in the case of a body of texts which has shaped our conceptions of gender to a large extent. Many different readings became suddenly important: not only the scholarly commentaries which biblical scholars tend to take as their major source—not always questioning opinions which are passed off as self-evident—but also more 'popular' readings, which the members of the various religious groups, and also non-religious members of our culture, read as just simpler versions of the Bible. Through rewritings such as translations, popularizations, and commentaries of all kinds, but also literary rewritings and paintings, views of the proper role and place of women are conveyed, with the aura of biblical sanctioning to make them look like truths instead of views.

When the idea emerged to compose a volume of essays around this issue of readership as ideological agency, I was pleased to find that Carol Delaney and Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes, both of whose work I considered indispensable for such a project, were willing to contribute, although they had not been part of the discussion group. The collection thereby gained in variety, in interest, and in quality. I wish

to thank the Harvard Divinity School and its members, which provided a congenial and highly stimulating environment for the critical thinking in which we were engaged, and especially Constance Buchanan, director of the Women's Studies in Religion Program, thanks to whom the right people were in the right place at the right moment. The kindness and interest of Patrick D. Miller, Jr of Princeton Theological Seminary, who was visiting the Harvard Divinity School the same year, has been a great encouragement. I also thank the contributors to this volume for their co-operative spirit and their patience.

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Mieke Bal teaches Comparative Literature and Art History at the University of Rochester. Her publications include *Death and Dissymmetry: the Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges*. She is currently writing on Rembrandt.

Carol Delaney teaches Anthropology at Stanford University. Among her publications are 'The Meaning of Paternity and the Virgin Birth Debate' in *Man*, 1986, and 'Seeds of Honor, Field of Shame' in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (ed. David Gilmore). Her interests focus on the relationship between cosmology and gender.

Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes is with the Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, where she is responsible for a flourishing women's studies in religion program. She teaches Hebrew Bible and Women's Studies. She has published widely in feminist-literary approaches to the Bible. Her book *En Sara in haar tent lachte* was recently translated into German. She is currently finishing a book on Judges 4 and 5.

Beth Gerstein has been a counselor in a rape crisis center. She has lectured widely on rape. She is currently in the Ph.D. program of Anthropology at Stanford University. She is interested in cross-cultural perceptions of sexuality, and the ways violence against women is culturally defined, maintained, and perpetuated.

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Betsy Merideth is interested in medieval manuscripts, in particular in questions of paleography and codicology, but also in tracing the transmission of ideas. She has worked for two years at the manuscript department of Houghton Library.

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INTRODUCTION

Mieke Bal

The Bible and Literature

Relations between biblical and literary scholarship tend to be limited to the question of 'literary readings of the Bible'—to the question if, and to what extent, the Bible can, deserves, and needs to be read 'as' literature. The question is wrongly put, and betrays an attempt to separate religious from secular concerns. Such an attempt is futile. The Bible, as at least partially a religious document, has been formative of Western culture. The culture as it is today carries the Bible with it, as it carries the rest of its founding texts. And diverse forms and degrees of religiosity are part of that culture. Literature, cultural need of literary texts and of literary 'life', in other words, the literary attitude, ideology, or way of life, is similarly undeniably part of the same culture. Hence, the Bible is both totally religious, whatever that may mean, and totally literary.

What should be retained from the notion of 'literary readings of the Bible' is not the question of literature but the question of *reading*. It is through that question that both disciplines can be mutually illuminating. Mutually: that is, without imperialist claims of 'theory' to be an 'instrument' for 'application'. Each of these terms is ready for thorough revision and critique. Mutually: that is, without imperialist claims of the Bible to be the 'primary', 'founding', 'true' text. Each of those terms is equally ripe for thorough revision and critique. *Reading* is the term that can help undermine the false certainties, truths, positivity of both disciplines. For the better of both.

The Bible and the Question of Reading

The first and obvious point to make is, that whatever scholarship does to the Bible, it is necessarily on the basis of reading. Be it from

the point of view of philology, historical criticism, textual criticism, or, on the literary side, close reading, structuralism, or deconstruction, each and every approach to the Bible starts with readings. Readings always in the plural. For not only is the text the object of reading, so also is the scholarly metatext. One begins with a reading of the methodological premises, the previous works, the often even unconscious burden of previous interpretations that one brings to the object of study. However obvious this point may be, scholars rarely live up to it. They seem to forget it whenever they make their claims, or worse, adopt their hardly stated premises.

In literary theory, influenced as it is by philosophical developments, the fact of reading has recently led to a thorough critique of the assumptions of close reading and structuralism. For a clear overview of those debates, see Culler (1975; 1981; 1983). The leading question in those debates is that of the location of meaning. New Criticism's claim that meaning is located in the text and only needs close reading to be extracted from it, although often criticized, partially remains the implicit claim underlying much literary and biblical scholarship. Structuralism, which seemed a reaction to New Criticism but which, over time, looks now much more like its off-shoot, provided that claim with a 'scientific' (because generalizable) view of language. The power of the text is still absolute for many a scholar, thus providing him or her with there appropriate veil covering; 'reading in' is what one's opponent is doing. The very term 'reading in', always used with negative connotations, is evidence for this textual positivism. If there is such a thing as in-reading, its opposite is around as well: true, positive reading, 'based on' the text 'as it stands'.

The textual positivism developed by New Criticism and structuralism was in its time a healthy attempt to rid scholarship of other pernicious biases. History proves the need was great. Central notions like intention—abhorred by the New Critics, yet never really done away with—or like the biblical Form Critic's *Sitz im Leben* ('life setting')—more often than not inferred from the text and, hence, by a circular argument—continue to impair critical reflection. According to those views, meaning is located not so much in the text as in its origin. Intention, social background, political-historical impulses, all are notions related to the idea of origin. Of course, texts do originate in a context and in the minds of people. But this truism only displaces the question. The text is one thing, and as a thing it is not much; its meaning is quite a different matter.

Meaning, according to more recent developments, is a property of the act of reading. Reading is no more than actualizing possibilities in one's own mind, and projecting them upon the object named 'text'. Radical reader-response critics deny the very existence of the object, as Stanley Fish's famous book-title suggests (*Is There a Text in this Class?*). A good overview of this current can be found in Tompkins (1980). As Jonathan Culler has demonstrated in 'Stories of Reading' (1983), however, this radical position flips over to its very opposite whenever the critic writes about meanings. Although meaning is located in the critic, the critic 'at work' protects him- or herself by claiming that the meanings s/he puts forward are more 'plausible' than others, because the text 'lends itself' to these particular meanings. Hence, we float back into textual positivism before we know it. The funniest thing is that the opposite is true as well: textual criticism, when defending their views, ultimately need to claim that their meanings are the most 'adequate' because the text 'suggests' them to the reader. Hence, the meaning is located in the reader. The way it is put, however, is that the text 'allows' for these meanings.

Reading and Responsibility

One problem has remained poorly discussed. What have these views of reading to say about the ethical responsibility for, and the political consequences of, reading? Dutch literary scholar Ernst van Alphen (1988), in a thorough discussion of this problem, denounces the monolithic character of these attempts to locate meaning. What worries him particularly—and I share his concern—is the elusiveness of these fluctuating conceptions of reading when it comes to ethical responsibility. And this question is extremely relevant whenever 'founding' texts are involved. Texts like the Bible are undeniably used, have been used, and will continue to be used, to shape social reality. The ways they are read vary greatly. The claims put forward as to the status of the readings through which that reality-shaping effect works are claims about ethical responsibility as well as about the location of meaning.

Van Alphen proposes a pluralistic conception of meaning of an interesting kind. Denying the innocence of both text and reader, he begins by stating, in the wake of speech-act theory, that both *perform* something. The danger of speech-act theory, however, is that it returns to intentional criticism. Van Alphen extends the performativity

to the reader without, however, positing a false similitude between the two. It is the collaboration, the coherence brought about between text and readerly response, which affects reality. *Effect* becomes the key notion. There is no coincidence, no symmetry, no equality between text and reader.

Van Alphen proposes to distinguish two 'moments of meaning'. The very terminology drives home the point that meaning is dynamic, to be seen as a process, not a fact. In the one moment, the text is the provider of meaning. That is, the text, as produced by its author, responds to and brings order into the collection of possible meanings couched in what Van Alphen calls the 'pre-text'. The pre-text is the historical, biographical, and ideological reality from which the text emerges. The reader can adopt the attitude of modest 'listening' to this text, but the text itself is the result of an act of listening, of reading.

The second moment of meaning occurs when the reader formulates an ordering and reworking of the collection of possible meanings offered by the text. Again, this reading is more than a reception or reproduction of the coherence 'inherent' in the text. In this moment of meaning the text is the occasion for meaning: signifier, rather than signified. Van Alphen summarizes his view in the following table:

	reflecting subject	analytic subject	object
first moment of meaning production	author	text as meaning —product	pre-text (historical ideological situation)
second moment of meaning production	empirical reader	functional reader (set of reading conventions)	text as signifier

The implications of this model are the following. The central notion becomes, now, *reflection*. The author reflects upon the pre-text, and the reader reflects upon the text which is his or her pre-text. Both subjects are directed by the conventions of reading of their time and social group, and by their own historical position. In order to grasp the process of meaning production it is crucial to analyze the conventions underlying the acts of reflection inherent in reading.

However eagerly one attempts to overcome the limitations of reading, every scholar of texts is a reader in the first place. Acknowledging that status, and accounting for the underlying guiding conventions, is a primary ethical responsibility of all scholars. Not only must we acknowledge the relative status of our readings, we also need to analyze the positions of power which underlie the social circulation of readings. What governs access to the privileged channels where readings can become public goods, to which others can adhere? The question inevitably becomes: how restrictive is scholarship?

Women as the Other

It is the merit of politicized scholarship, like feminist, gay, and black studies, to have drawn attention to those unseen restrictions in scholarly practice which have made it possible for readers to claim that they possess the truth of interpretation. What these developments have been spectacularly successful in demonstrating is the readerly quality of all interpretation. The still limited, but no more excluded, participation of these scholars in the debates about 'what the texts mean' have had the radical impact of showing that no scholarship is void of interpretive acts, of historical and ideological biases, and of the blindness inherent in privileged positions. To stay with the example of feminist scholarship which is the focus of this volume (without excluding the other politicized disciplines): the merest fragment of feminist biblical scholarship constitutes a challenge to established assumptions. That is the tremendous power of the *other*. Nothing could be more appropriate.

Indeed, the mechanism at work here is a fascinating one. The dynamic of establishment and maintenance of identity works on the distinction between self and other. That dynamic is such that self is defined by exclusion of what is perceived as other. Hence, it has been by excluding women—or blacks, or gays, or the young, or the poor—that the identity of the dominant group—say, to simplify a bit, the group comprising white, middle-class, middle-aged men—has been constructed. This group undeniably dominates, if not the world at large, at least biblical and other literary scholarship. Reflection on that position of dominance, and its influence on the readings which the group produces, is imperative if we wish to understand better what happens in meaning-production. The relatively marginal

contributions of deviant scholarship, imposing the sense of presence of 'the other', promotes this reflection. Hence this paradox: established scholarship can profit immensely from what it should stop trying to exclude, ignore, or deny. The very fact of the present volume demonstrates that the awareness of this virtually enriching presence is acknowledged at least in some circles.

But, of course, feminism's primary aim is not to help dominant scholarship to strengthen its identity by promoting the quality of its work. While this positive effect is operating, feminists pursue their own goals, among which is the important one of representing women's readings on the general scene of scholarship. According to Van Alphen's theory of meaning production, women read differently, not because of some innate quality but simply because they have a different background. In a segregated society, women's lives are different from men's. That obvious fact holds for contemporary readers, but also for the readers whose orderings in their pre-text produced the texts.

If women today are better equipped than men to understand those parts and aspects of the Bible which have been under-emphasized, there is no reason for surprise, let alone for disturbance. Women, by virtue of their so far excluded position, can rearrange the text in such a way that the accounts of women's lives as we find them in the Bible become more interesting, more instructive, more inspiring than they were read so far. Unfortunately, they also become more disturbing, due to the disturbing distribution of power in the text's pre-text. But rather than repressing or explaining away the disturbing aspects of the text, the response of the female readers, or male readers willing and able to 'read as a woman' (Culler 1983) should be gratefully acknowledged as an addition or an improvement.

Narrative Theory and Women's Lives

In the present volume, readings by women are presented. Explicitly proposed as *readings*, without positivistic claims to truth, these papers share a concern for the ethics of reading. They share a concern for method, but also the refusal to see in theories and methods a mastercode immune to critique, which can be 'applied' to a text and will then yield reliable results. Instead, methods are used in two ways: as an object of critique, with a status equal to that of the text itself; and as a 'subtext', a discourse that can be brought to bear

on the text while, in the process, being exposed to the same critique to which the text itself is exposed.

Many of the contributions are partially or entirely based on the method of analysis called *narratology*. A few words are necessary to explain why, and to indicate what status this method has in the readings. Narratology—at least as I conceive it (Bal 1985)—starts from the paradoxical premise offered explicitly by Van Alphen, that meaning is a readerly product, yet based on an elaboration of the possibilities offered by the text. Although the reader is entirely responsible for her or his reading, the text is no more ‘innocent’. Indeed, the text is, in a way, itself a reading, for which it is called to account.

Thus, narratology asks the text three basic questions. The first question is: who speaks? That is to say, who has the right and power to posit a specific account of the events? This question looks for the subject of speech in the text, the identity of the narrator, and the moments when embedded speakers are quoted. The general assumption about the Hebrew Bible is that its speakers are male. Nevertheless, sometimes female agents are quoted, and the status of those quotations remains to be assessed. How free is Jephthah’s daughter, for example, to respond as she does or otherwise, when her father accuses her of causing him grief by being his sacrificial victim? The second question is: who sees? That is to say, whose view is given in that account? This question looks for the commitments of the speaker, the ways in which s/he represents some other subject. Does the speaker represent the view of the holders of power, and if so, which views are partially but not always entirely repressed? In the story of Jephthah’s daughter, again, the status of the daughter as ‘virgin’ is worded by the (male?) narrator at one point, but by the daughter herself at another, differently. Which views are represented here concerning virginity, and where do they come from? The third question is: who acts? That is to say, which actions are performed by which agents, and what is their position as agents? In the story of Tamar and Judah, in Genesis 38, for example, Tamar’s deceit cannot be viewed in isolation, for it is a response to Judah’s preceding behaviour.

These three questions are the leading ones in many of the following papers. The aim of the papers is not to ‘prove’ how unequal is the distribution of power in the biblical stories about women. Rather, they show a narrative structure which is the result of the

authors' ordering of the pre-textual material, which may have been quite different. This structure is at the same time also the result of the confrontation brought about by contemporary women between this ordering and their own concerns, which is the lives of other women. Narratology is thus not an 'instrument' which is 'applied' to the text, not a theory or mastercode which inevitably brings about the truth, but a method or code chosen by specific scholars because they expect it to help them formulate their own readings in accessible ways.

Anti-Covenant and the Legacy of Abraham

The volume is not, however, mono-disciplinary. The narratological perspective is integrated, in most papers, with concerns stemming from other disciplines. Anthropology is an important one in that respect, with history, theology, and philology as less central discourses. Indeed, it can be argued that anthropology, with its holistic perspective and its mediation between historical and cultural reality, is the discipline which is best equipped to help feminist scholars formulate their socially oriented views. As I have argued elsewhere (1988), anthropology is capable of demonstrating that the opposition between historical 'fact' and literary 'fiction' is in itself an ideological bias, meant to sever what people think, imagine, and desire from the harsh reality of wars and violence which historical records falsely present as the only reality people live in.

The first paper, by anthropologist Carol Delaney, challenges the 'legacy of Abraham'. The age-old interpretation of the story of Isaac's near-sacrifice focuses on Abraham's absolute faith and willingness to sacrifice even his own child to prove it. Delaney cuts through readings which have long been taken for granted. Why, she asks, do we assume that child sacrifice is the issue at stake, and why, if it is indeed the issue, do we grant it a positive value? The interests underlying this standard interpretation are obvious. If child sacrifice is the issue, Abraham's story can be read as the termination of the custom. Evolutionism orients this assumption. Child sacrifice is then an ancient, barbaric custom whose savagery has been abolished by the ancient Israelites who replaced it with the more acceptable symbolic 'willingness to kill'.

From a comparative, anthropological perspective, Delaney reads the story instead as a demonstration of the absolute authority of the

father. Thus she is able to emphasize that Sarah is not consulted, and to explain the omission. Infanticide is a fatherly prerogative, and the only one entitled to intervene is God the superfather, not the mother. The child sacrifice does not end the father-right but establishes it. In turn, fatherhood is redefined and its old, ideological definition criticized. Delaney therefore reaches conclusions that lie beyond this story alone. She shows that the power of the father is not self-evident, is painstakingly constructed, and needs constant confirmation. Abraham's covenant partakes of that construction.

The volume opens with this important article because in it patriarchy is shown in its vulnerability, its less than self-evident self-justification, and its repression of female autonomy. Thus, the discussion about gender and the Bible begins where it must begin—at the roots of patriarchy, not as an eternal state-of-the-world but as an old, yet changeable, attempt at domination. Symmetrical to this article is psychologist Ann Marmesh's paper, which shows the 'other side'. The legacy of Abraham is undermined by what she refers to as 'anti-covenant', the traces of deviations from the less than monolithic system put forward in the patriarch-stories. Marmesh also begins with anthropology, with the rules of kinship defined by a scholarship whose complicity with the ideology of male dominance becomes painfully apparent.

Marmesh emphasizes those aspects of the system of procreation put forward in Genesis, which upset the dominant, diachronic reading 'from father to son'. Starting from the other side, equally represented in the biblical text, of synchronic linking between husband and wife, Marmesh shows the important participation of the women in the continuation of the line. But she goes much further. Not only is procreation much more a female activity than is generally acknowledged, it is in itself not the only concern the Genesis women seem to be preoccupied with. Once the biased readings of anthropological theory are displayed, the paper proposes daring readings of the same stories, according to which female self-pleasuring and autonomy partake of the social consequences of the covenant's many generative powers.

Thus, the first section proposes two parallel movements. The first movement is a critical one. The theories of anthropology are seen as readings, not as mastercodes possessing the power to bring about the truth. Second these theories are seen as accomplices of the very ideology they are supposed to analyze. The second movement is an

assertive one. Once the pre-established readings are dismantled of their unrightfully usurped power, the way is paved for alternative readings. In those readings, the other side of male behavior (Delaney) and the experience of women—whose traces are all but repressed from the text (Marmesh)—are magnified, hence, made visible against the tradition. Let us call the complicity between the theoretical discourses and the text a kind of covenant whose relations with the covenant between Yahweh and Abraham are to be explored. Then the new complicity between feminist readers and the female side of the text can be seen as an anti-covenant. This term expresses well the project of which this volume is a token.

While working on this volume, I have hesitated between a systematic division of the volume according to approaches, or a thematic one according to subjects of the stories analyzed. As it happens, both divisions overlap largely. The remaining chapters are divided into two groups. In the first group, stories about powerful, effective women are read against subjugating readings which try to turn these women either into wicked monsters or into subordinated, secondary leaders. The second group of chapters focuses on victims. Powerful women are exceptional in the Bible. The more common position for women is that of object of gift, exchange, sale, or theft. In a few cases, these object-positions have been carried to the extreme. These stories of radical victimhood have also been read in ways which preclude insight into their victim's experience.

The two sections, 'Until I arose' and 'Commemorating the dead' have in common that all chapters deal with a reading while proposing a reading, and make some use of narratology. Chapter 3 begins again at a well-known point—the murderous woman, and the parallel issue of misreading. Betsy Merideth compares the stories of Delilah and Judith, two women who seduce a man in order to undo him. The first woman is generally considered wicked, the second is praised, albeit often ambivalently. Merideth looks at the stories from the point of view of power and its distribution. Discussing the status of interpretations, even 'correct' ones, as just another case of misreadings whose 'misses do not matter', she can then propose her own reading as another, equally valid and equally invalid reading. Using narratology as a guideline Merideth conceives of focalization (the question: who sees?) as a proposal for meaning. Through her interpretation, carried out in interaction with other interpretations, it becomes clear that not only negative, but also positive images of women can carry anti-women ideologies.

The next three chapters each deal in some way with the character of Deborah, *the* positive image of a woman in the Hebrew Bible. In Chapter 4, Rachel Rasmussen counters the traditional attempts to read-away Deborah's prominent position with an endeavor to read her back into the book of Judges. She starts at the acknowledged *problem* of Deborah, that is, at the question why she is a problem at all. She analyzes the problem by tackling the presuppositions by which scholars tend to (dis)solve it. Rasmussen proposes to read the story of Deborah in light of a sociological analysis of cultural movements in which women played a leading role. Deborah is related to Anath, an alternative to Yahweh as the image of the warrior. Also, the context of cults of spirit possession which she invokes makes sense in relation to the Song of Deborah as a speech act. Thus, the illuminating subtext enhances not only the text's content but also its form and status in the cultural community from which it emerged.

Stephen Hanselman also connects Deborah's story with another ancient near eastern myth, the tale of Aquat, but his purpose is more contrastive. He does not put the story of Deborah within the context of the other text but, rather, makes a comparative analysis which shows the common aspect as well as the oppositions between the two texts. Hanselman considers a text as a summons to respond, neglect being one form of response. Discussing Eco's concept of the 'model reader' to which a text addresses itself, he contrasts that model reader with its own pragmatic impossibility. His starting point is a radically readerly conception of meaning, wherein the fabula of a text is an 'inferential walk' through the text, performed by the reader. Such a walk begins with a hypothetical narrative theme, which entails a number of semantic pre-commitments. Thus, Hanselman is primarily interested in Van Alphen's functional reader as the locus of meaning.

The contrastive analysis of the two texts shows the trickiness of thematic comparison, where the recognition of common elements tends to lead to the conclusion that the two texts are of similar structure and meaning, or of identical origin. Instead, the tale of Aquat is seen as a means to realize the transformation that shows in the other text. The tale is then a prototype for reversal, not an historical precedent; it sheds light on the overturning of male power that takes place in the other text.

Chapter 6 highlights the Bible's power to shape constructions of

gender, even in reality today. Jane Shaw starts from Gadamer's notion of the 'classic' as a text interpreted as a purveyor of truth. Two episodes of the 'effective history' of the story of Deborah are demonstrated through the analysis of two popular rewritings of the story by women who, each in her own way, uses the story to propose or impose a construction of 'woman', ascribed to God. The ideological attempts to construct a coherent view of Deborah cannot but falter, Shaw argues, simply because there is no coherent subject in the text. Shaw's plea is for an explicit multivocality, which alone is able to break down the very idea of 'woman'.

Section three opens with a paper that mediates between the stories of effective women and those of the victims. Fokkeliën van Dijk-Hemmes gives a detailed reading of the stories of (one? two?) Tamar(s). In a daring comparatist endeavor, she confronts 2 Samuel 13, the story of the rape of David's daughter, Tamar, by her brother, Amnon—a victim story if ever there was—with Genesis 38, the story of a victorious Tamar who undermines the power of the patriarch. The one Tamar pays for her womanhood, the other one, Van Dijk-Hemmes suggests, makes the father pay for her namesake's destruction. This chapter comes closest to what used to be called a close reading—and what seems to be, rather, a 'close encounter of the third kind'. Unlike the New Critics, Van Dijk-Hemmes does not pretend to be alone with the text, in a true dialogue; rather, she encounters the text together with the others who have met it before her, and who have provided it with apologies of various kinds. This, already, turns the encounter into a triadic one.

Van Dijk-Hemmes brings to the text yet another set of sub-texts—the more diffused but highly relevant one of sexual violence. In this chapter, the themes are put forward which return in the remaining chapters and the stories they deal with: violence and hatred against women as an inherent evil of patriarchy; the mechanism of 'blaming the victim'; the rejection of deflowered virgins, condemned to expulsion or death. The analysis, powerful both in itself and by virtue of the theme of the story, gains in depth by the hypothesis in the second part: that Genesis 38 can be read as a midrash on 2 Samuel 13. Thus, in yet another way, this becomes a close encounter of the third kind: appropriating an episode of the patriarch-stories as well as the genre of midrash, Van Dijk-Hemmes reads the text with the other text as sub-text. The effect is to read with ancient women—Genesis-Tamar read as standing with David's daughter—for contemp-

orary women, who are still subject to sexual violence in a reality shaped by stories like these.

In Chapter 8, Anne Michele Tapp shows once more the power of comparative analysis when critically done. In a move symmetrical to that of Hanselman, who warned against easy identification between stories by showing their differences, Tapp shows the critical value of establishing relations between stories. Comparing Genesis 19, Judges 11, and Judges 19, she demonstrates how, in all three stories, virgin-daughters are sacrificed. Both the virginity (as a social category) and the 'sacrifice' of all three young women become convincing once virginity and sacrifice are put in the same frame-work; that of narratology and feminism. Narratively speaking, the three cases have in common that the characters are nameless, passive, and silent. This feature makes it only too easy to gloss them over, or to deny the atrocity of the behavior toward them. What is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of these stories is their very presence: disturbing as they are, they must have survived attempts at censorship. This suggests, not only that these stories are 'strong' as *stories*—too well known, at the time of the final redaction, to be left out—but also, that in terms of *content*, they have something to say that could not be censored away.

Beth Gerstein begins her search for that 'something' in Chapter 9 by returning to anthropology. Unlike Delaney, she does not turn to the great anthropological theories of kinship, but to the more modest theories of aspects of daily life. She wonders whether the limited interest in women as displayed by the biblical stories stems from the actual inferior statuses of women, from a lack of interest on the part of the narrator, or from a lack of interest on the part of the interpreter. Each of these three possibilities can be combined with the others, but does not automatically imply the others. Gerstein uses narratology as a critique of anthropological theories, in order to magnify the little details from which information on the lives of women can be inferred.

The powerful subtext Gerstein uses is the idea of *ritual* behavior. But, in order to make that hypothesis work, she needs to criticize the theory of ritual as proposed by structural anthropologist Victor Turner. Showing that the notion of status elevation, goal and outcome of Turnerian ritual, is irrelevant for women in a society where their status is low to begin with, Gerstein demonstrates, in the wake of Carolyn Walker Bynum, that Turner's 'genderless' category

only holds for men. Once this demystification has taken place, the way is paved for a reading of Judg. 11.40 as one such tiny detail that, once magnified, can provide insight into women's lives and interests.

In Chapter 10, Cynthia Baker reads Pseudo-Philo's rewriting of Judges 11 as a case of what is sometimes called 'productive reception'. Pseudo-Philo's story was to his time what the two texts analyzed by Shaw are for ours—readings proposed as faithful repetitions, yet a new story which actively responds to, and redefines, the issues collected in the biblical text. Baker analyzes in detail the lament, a rare piece of lyricism in ancient times. Her analysis is gender-specific: she shows how the first half of the lament is modelled upon the father to whom it is addressed, thus using impersonal and abstract constructions, while the second half is addressed to the mother whose relation to her daughter allows the latter to express concerns of a completely different kind. Baker is able to provide a beautiful explanation of an apparent contradiction in the lament, in which the daughter first seems to accept, then to protest against her death. This interpretation is a convincing demonstration of the surplus result of feminist scholarship. The lyric, in this paper, becomes more interesting as a human document, more valuable as a literary text, more instructive as a historical source of life in ancient times.

In the final chapter, I propose yet another discussion of Jephthah's daughter, the exemplary victim of male violence. The debate concentrates, here, on philology itself, the key discipline in biblical scholarship since it at least provides the preparatory work, at most the outcome, of textual research. With one tiny example, philology's biases are demonstrated, while the possibilities of a feminist philology are explored. Thus, the volume ends opposite to where it began: it started with shaky foundations of patriarchy; it concludes by shaking the foundations of patriarchal scholarship. Yet the very notion of a feminist philology shows that undermining, critiquing, denouncing established scholarship is *not* the primary, let alone the only goal of feminist scholarship. The chapter also shows what feminists have learned, and can still learn, from the very methods they must also suspect, in the course of the most challenging endeavor in the humanities today—the practice of hermeneutics of suspicion.

I

THE LEGACY OF ABRAHAM: DUBIOUS MALE DOMINANCE AND FEMALE AUTONOMY

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THE LEGACY OF ABRAHAM

Carol Delaney

Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you (Gen. 22.2).

By faith, Abraham when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son (Heb. 11.17).

The story of the 'sacrifice of Isaac' is not just one story among others, it is 'central to the nervous system of Judaism and Christianity' (Spiegel 1969: xvii). Not only does it establish Abraham as the father of faith, but provides the model and the metaphors for the description and interpretation of the Crucifixion. Abraham is considered the father of the three Western religions; Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Whether or not we belong to one of these religions our values, laws, institutions as well as literature and art have been deeply affected by them. Many of us are beginning to question the values, institutions and laws of our culture, and therefore it seems fitting to look again at the story of the founding father.

The biblical scholar E.A. Speiser says 'the break between Primeval History and the Story of the Patriarchs is sharper than is immediately apparent' (Speiser 1964: liii).¹ It is important to bear this in mind for the remainder of the paper. Although the Bible begins with Creation the history of our culture rightly begins with Abraham. Therefore a word about time and place. Abraham, if such a person actually existed, is thought to have lived in the early centuries of the second millennium BC. During this time Haran, his

home, was a major crossroad on the ancient trade routes connecting the south and the east with the north and the west. Not only would articles for trade and technological advances have been transmitted, but customs, beliefs and stories.

Profound changes were taking place in the ancient Near East during the period between 2500 and 2000 BC (*Cambridge Ancient History* 1971).² It is my view that among other things there was a change in the beliefs about pregnancy and human conception. I think there was a shift from the understanding that the male had a role in conception to the assumption that it was the primary role. I suggest that Abraham is a symbol of this change.

My purpose in looking at the story of the 'sacrifice of Isaac' is not to reinterpret it to suit present needs, to make it relevant, but rather to use present concern as a basis for asking new questions of the story.

Shalom Spiegel says the Akedah, as this story is called, 'renews itself in every time of crisis' (back cover) when people are suffering from oppression. It is meant to fortify them, to give them courage in their trials as Abraham displayed in his.

But is this the kind of model we need now? Why is the theme of child sacrifice *the* theme chosen by Biblical writers to express devotion to God? Why is Abraham's willingness to kill Isaac seen as an expression of great piety? Why is Sarah's point of view noticeably absent? Does the story have the same meaning for women, or is it a symptom of masculine culture?

Many people feel the story was intended as a prohibition against child sacrifice. When I turned to traditional interpretations of the story I found that most commentators focused on Abraham's piety. And his piety is based not on the fact that he put an end to the practice but on the fact that he was willing to kill Isaac. He is extolled precisely because he was able to suppress his compassion in order to perform God's will with a perfect heart (*Encyclopedia Judaica*: 2.482).

One commentator says 'it was desired to show that Abraham's devotion to the God he worshipped was capable of going to the furthest point religion could reach. . . . If men worshipping pagan deities could carry their religion to that terrific cost' ('Genesis', *Interpreter's Bible*: 642), how could Abraham do less? He cites as evidence the fact that in the time of Elisha (850 BC) the king offered his son.

This commentator in trying to find a rationale for Abraham's deed has confused his history and his terms. What should be immediately apparent is that Abraham's deed is supposed to have occurred as much as 1,000 years earlier than those of the so-called pagans with whom he is seen in competition. Furthermore, the term pagan would have been meaningless in Abraham's time.

The crucial question is whether child sacrifice as a religious ritual³ was already an established practice in Abraham's time, or was it introduced then, practiced sporadically, only to reach its full expression at a much later date?⁴ It was at this later time that biblical writers, gathering and compiling material, were desirous of making a distinction between themselves and other Canaanites. The linear and progressive view of history inherent in the Bible supports the interpretation of the element of child sacrifice in the Abraham story as a relic or fossil surviving from some more primitive and barbaric people. The Bible as well as those who take a developmental evolutionary stance toward history and culture would lead us to believe that child sacrifice was a primordial custom which was modified only with the advance of civilization. The evidence does not support this view. When it has occurred child sacrifice has appeared in highly civilized and advanced societies, and the evidence for the practice in the ancient Near East is confined to the first millennium BC. Developmental evolutionary theory when applied to culture is dangerous in its assumptions, and tends, because of its seeming truth, to inhibit questions. Those who argue that the story symbolizes the prohibition of an ancient cultic practice have occasionally recognized the inconsistencies in the story and their theory. It is perhaps for this reason that they turned instead to an exposition of Abraham's piety. I find this exegesis equally unsatisfactory for I do not see why the willingness to kill a child should be considered a test of piety and the prime example of it. The object of this paper is to see what other possibilities of meaning are latent in the story.

The story of Abraham begins with the call from God to abandon the land and religion of his fathers. Implicit in the story is the idea that the religion of his fathers included child sacrifice.

Philo of Alexandria, one of the earliest commentators on the story, tells us that 'in Babylonia and Mesopotamia and with the nations of the Chaldeans with whom he (Abraham) lived the greater part of his life the custom of child slaughter does not obtain' (Colson 1935:

7.93). In other words, at least in Philo's view, child sacrifice was not a feature of the religion of Abraham's ancestors. In order to skirt the enormity of the implications, Philo turns to Abraham's piety thus setting the direction that all future commentary would take.

Philo says 'Abraham concedes nothing to the tie of relationship but his whole weight is thrown into the scale on the side of acceptability with God. . . he did not incline partly to the boy and partly to piety, but devoted his whole soul through and through to holiness and disregarded the claims of their common blood' (97). Philo is earnest to distinguish Abraham from others who have sacrificed their children 'for their country to serve as a price to redeem it from wars or drought or excessive rainfall or pestilence' (89).⁵ There was no motive save the love of God, and but for this, Philo says Abraham 'would have been the first himself to initiate a totally new and extraordinary procedure' (95).

The points that Philo makes are precisely those that Søren Kierkegaard takes up in *Fear and Trembling*. The 'knight of faith' is, because of his extraordinary devotion, able to suspend the categories of the human ethical realm. His 'faith is a paradox which is capable of transforming a murder into a holy act well pleasing to God' (Kierkegaard 1941). Abraham is not a tragic hero, as are Agamemnon or Jephtha, for his deed was not done 'for the sake of saving a people, not to maintain the idea of state' (70).⁶ The hero, according to Kierkegaard, could rest his conscience in the universal ethical realm; but this is the very category Abraham has had to suspend. Abraham 'acts by virtue of the absurd', he is 'either a murderer or a believer' (67). In order that Abraham be absolved of murder, Kierkegaard, as Philo before him, has had to transform him into someone super-human. Kierkegaard's idolatry of the individual has gone to the farthest reach, his 'knight of faith' acts in a moral vacuum where there is no reference for judgment.

What becomes clear is that the love of God or duty (heroism) comes before the love of people. In fact love of God is placed in opposition to love of kin rather than the fulfillment of it.⁷ This theme is continued in the New Testament in the requirements for discipleship. For example, Jesus says: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children. . . he cannot be my disciple' (Lk. 14.56). Notice that he does not permit the wife the same right against the husband. The line that shocks us even more is when Jesus is told that his mother has come to see him, and

he turns to the people he is addressing and says: 'Who is my mother?' (Mt. 12.48) He goes on to say that whoever does the will of God is his brother, sister and mother. Notice that he does not say father. This leaves the position of the human father highly ambiguous (Kittel and Friedrich 1967).⁸

But let us return to the subject of child sacrifice. The Bible is itself ambivalent on this subject. 'Consecrate to me all the first born whatever is the first to open the womb of the people Israel' (Exod. 22.29). And 'Do not give any of your seed to Molech and so profane the name of your God' (Lev. 18.21) can be interpreted more as a prohibition against the worship of other gods than against the practice of child sacrifice.

The ambivalence goes deeper. The slaughter of innocents receives quite a different valuation depending on who does it. When Pharaoh decrees that all the first born sons of the Hebrews shall be cast into the Nile it is an abomination, yet when God slaughters the first born sons of the Egyptians it is justified. Abraham's willingness to kill Isaac is seen as an act of greatest piety, yet a comparable willingness in a Canaanite is reprehensible.

The Bible tells us that a ram was substituted for Isaac, and it does give evidence that first born sons were redeemed from their fate by the substitution of animals, the payment of money or dedication into the Levitical priesthood. However, the ambivalence between the practice and the substitution was never really resolved, for the Bible also gives evidence that the practice of child sacrifice continued throughout early Israelite history (Mosca 1975).⁹ The substitution obscures but does not entirely erase the original intention. One is still left with the uneasy feeling that the child was considered the *appropriate* sacrifice.

This is confirmed by the uses to which the story has been put at various times in history. I can give only a few examples. In the ninth century AD children planted seeds in baskets which they swung round their heads with the incantation: 'This be in lieu of me, this is my substitute and my exchange' and threw the baskets into the river (*The Jewish Encyclopedia*: 7.436).¹⁰ During the Middle Ages the Akedah story was re-interpreted by some European Jews so that Abraham did kill Isaac. And when they were suffering persecution from the Crusaders, they considered it their sacred duty to kill their own children for the Sanctification of the Name (Spiegel 1969).

During the twentieth century AD the story was invoked not only to

give courage to parents as they sent their sons off to war, but to inspire heroic passion in the young men. Wilfred Owen, aware of this use of the story, wrote 'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young' which ends with the following:

When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns,
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son—
And half the seed of Europe, one by one (Owen).¹²

And the summer when I was doing research in the area of Haran, I met a woman who had just given birth to her first child after a long period of barrenness. She had travelled to this place to offer a ram sacrifice in the name of Abraham in order that her child might not die.

The legend goes on, the ambivalence continues. But where did the idea that the first child belonged to the deity come from, what was its motivation? Some would like to see an analogy between the offering of first fruits and the sacrifice of the first born. But is the offering of fruits and vegetables from one's abundance motivated by the same impulse as the taking away of life?¹³

To interpret the story of the 'sacrifice of Isaac' only within the Judeo-Christian tradition is somewhat tautologous. However if it can be placed in a context and seen in relation to other stories we get a completely new perspective. Not only can we begin to see common themes but are in a better position to evaluate the differences.

While there are several stories one could choose, I would like to focus on Hesiod's *Theogony*, because it, like Genesis, is a story of origins and the establishment of a new religion.¹⁴ Zeus, like Abraham, is the father of a new faith; admittedly the one is reputed to be an historical human figure, the other a god. The 'succession myth' recounted in the *Theogony* seems to have been known in various forms throughout the ancient Near East in the second millennium BC (West 1966), although the *Theogony* is a late version. It is thought to have been written down in the eighth century BC and the source for the story of Abraham is thought to stem from the ninth century BC. But both refer back to a time in the past that was roughly contemporary.

In the Greek story Ouranos is jealous of his sons and so . . .

from the beginning, and every time each one
 was beginning
 to come out, he would push them back again,
 deep inside Gaia. . .
 Ouranos exulted
 in his wicked work; but great Gaia
 groaned within for pressure
 of pain (Lattimore 1959: 132).

Kronos, one son who escaped, devised a plan to castrate his father and assume his position. From the blood of the castration came the Erinyes whose 'original function (was to) avenge injuries inflicted only on a mother' (Graves: 1.38). We shall meet them again later. Kronos, having established his position with violence, must hold it with violence:

Rheia, submissive in love to Kronos
 bore glorious children. . .
 but, as each of these children
 came from the womb of its mother. . .
 Kronos swallowed it down,
 with the intention
 that no other of the proud children,
 of the line of Ouranos
 should ever hold the king's position. . .
 For . . . it has been ordained. . .
 (that he would be) *beaten* by his *son*. . .
 therefore he kept watch and did not sleep
 but waited
 for his children, and swallowed them,
 and Rheia's sorrow was beyond forgetting (Lattimore: 150).¹⁵

The castration deed, the son's aggression against the father, rather than the infanticide, is what has been remembered and elaborated. When Rheia is about to give birth again, she wraps a stone in swaddling clothes and gives it to Kronos instead of the infant Zeus. It is interesting to note that in both the Greek and Hebrew stories the substitute is provided by someone other than the father; here it is the mother, in the Bible the angel of the Lord stays Abraham's hand which enables him to look up and see the ram. This gives additional evidence that the mitigating influence did not originate with the father.

The substitute became symbolic, for the stone¹⁶ when disgorged by Kronos became associated with the sacred stone at Delphi in a later

stage of Greek religion. We might remember that the ram substituted for Isaac later became associated with Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Stories of the infant Zeus are attached to Crete where he is thought to be the son of the Mother Goddess, and in these Kronos plays no part (West: 290). Stories of the adult Zeus are thought to have accompanied the Indo-Europeans who invaded Greece in the second millenium BC. The *Theogony* records the result of the combination of these two traditions. Zeus is the last god in the 'succession myth' proper, and it is with him that the final transition to the patriarchal way of life was effected.

Zeus did not become the chief god of the Greek pantheon without more violence. Those who stood in his way were bound in Tartaros: there remained only one who threatened his position—Metis, the goddess who knew more than all the gods or mortal people. Zeus had heard that she would give birth to marvelous children, first Athena and then a *son* who would *overthrow* him. So when Metis was pregnant with Athena he swallowed her (Lattimore: 176-177). The only aspect of this story remembered in our culture is that in which Zeus gives birth to Athena by himself. Is this an example of the incorporation of the worship a goddess into the service of a patriarchal religion? In fact, are the infanticidal stories the means of demonstrating the authority of the father?

Given the differences in tone, certain common themes do emerge. What is striking is the association of infanticide and castration as the means of establishing the new religion. To put it another way, the killing of a child and the mutilation of the male sexual organ are the means by which power is usurped. Kronos has been identified with 'El the great god of the Canaanites, and 'El is the name of the god of Abraham. There is even one version in which Kronos ('El) sacrifices his son and circumcises himself (Gifford 1903). If these stories in one form or another were known in the ancient Near Eastern world, does it seem unreasonable to suppose that there is at *least* a reflection of them in the Biblical account of Abraham's 'sacrifice of Isaac' (Cross 1973). Although there is no elaborated succession story in the Bible, it is to Abraham's seed, namely Isaac and those who come after, that the promises are given. And if one were attempting to make exact correlations between the Greek and Hebrew stories Isaac, rather than Abraham, would be equivalent with Zeus, for he, like Zeus, was the child redeemed by the substitute. Yet Isaac, the child of promise, is strangely not a very prominent figure in the Bible. This fact has

given rise to speculation that Isaac was sacrificed, and that the substitution rite was a late modification. In the Bible, the 'succession' has been circumscribed, perhaps artificially, and limited to one generation in the story of Abraham. However, my purpose is not to make equivalencies, but to raise certain themes. Despite the fact that there is no proper succession story in the Bible, Abraham is the founding father of a new religion, a new way of life, for it is through him that God establishes his covenant with the chosen people. Once again, the theme of killing a child and the male sexual organ (in this case circumcision) are associated and are dominant aspects of the story describing the establishment of the new religion.

I suggest there is another standpoint one can take in looking at these stories; they could be viewed as different responses to a similar phenomenon, the responses varying in accordance with the background and experience of the indigenous people. What then is the phenomenon to which they respond?

It would appear that maleness in the aspect of paternity forms the nucleus. Abraham means the father is exalted; in relation to whom, we might ask. His penis is the holy place of the covenant. Zeus and 'El are to be regarded primarily as patriarchs and the 'succession myths' recount the battles in which they won patriarchal authority. Yahweh appears to mean the calling into being of a name, progeny (Cross: 65, 66). The power of life and death over a child is a demonstration of the power and authority of the father's right. Is the new order referred to the establishment of the authority of the father? What has been revealed?

I suggest that Abraham is the symbol of a change in world view precipitated by the idea that man had come to view their role in conception as primary. I am not so naive to assume it marks the discovery of male participation in procreation, but rather marks the momentous shift from the knowledge of participation to the assumption that it was the primary role. The biblical mind interpreted semen as *seed*, the child in essence, the part for the whole. In this understanding the child is fashioned solely by the impregnating principle provided by the father while the woman supplies nothing of her essential being to the child (Mace 1953). She serves merely as the *soil* in which the seed is planted, her value becomes derivative.

This idea of conception is mirrored in the Greek stories. Clytaemnestra is angry with Agamemnon for tricking her into sending Iphigenia to Aulis (supposedly to be married) and then

sacrificing her. Clytaemnestra kills Agamemnon upon his return, and Orestes in his turn murders Clytaemnestra, his mother. The Erinnyes wish to avenge her death by pursuing and tormenting Orestes, and there are versions of the story in which they do. But in the play by Aeschylus Orestes is absolved of guilt because:

The mother is no parent of that which is called her child, but only the nurse of the new-planted seed that grows. The parent is he who mounts. . . . There she stands, the living witness, daughter of Olympian Zeus, she who was never fostered in the dark of the womb (Lattimore 1967).

Athena did indeed have a mother, but Aeschylus chose to ignore that fact. The Erinnyes are infuriated and outraged by what is going on; 'Gods of the younger generation you have ridden down the laws of the elder time' (Lattimore 163), Athena, now under the power of her father, intervenes and blackmails them into accepting a position in the new regime. 'I promise you a place of your own, deep hidden underground. . . where you shall sit. . . beside the hearth' (163) and 'No household shall prosper without you' (166). Originally out to avenge crimes done only to a mother, the Erinnyes have been transformed into goddesses of marriage. They too have been placated and put into the service of patriarchal institutions. 'Orestes' absolution records the final triumph of patriarchy' (Graves: 270).

The view of conception in which the male is the primary engendering one sheds light on the alignment of the *powers* of creativity and spirituality with the male principle and the *virtues* of receptivity and materiality with the female. Prior to this view of conception it seems quite likely that the *religious* power accruing from the miracle of birth belonged to women regardless of whether earlier cultures were truly matriarchies. As the idea of male supremacy in conception took hold, not only did female deities and women themselves lose the power and status they had once enjoyed (Kramer 1970), but the earth too became desacralized, it too became merely soil. The earth and the fruits thereof became the property of men, as did women and children. The seed is the father's, the father and the son are one,¹⁸ the woman is merely the vehicle through which this relationship is established.

What are the consequences of this view of conception? The first problem that comes to mind is that of the so-called legitimacy of a child. E.A. Speiser has this to say: 'The integrity of the mission must be safeguarded in transmission, the purity of the content protected

by the quality of the container' (Speiser: 93-94). In other words, the container womb must be unsullied. Female virginity before marriage and fidelity after marriage became matters of utmost concern. If the tokens of virginity were not found in a betrothed maiden, 'The men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has wrought folly in Israel by playing the harlot' (Deut. 22.21). And if the 'spirit of jealousy' comes upon a man and 'he is jealous of his wife. . . he shall bring her to the priest' (Num. 5.14-15), who made her drink a mixture of holy water and dirt. If it made her sick it was assumed she was guilty of adultery and the penalty was death. One writer has said, 'No doubt many injustices were suffered in consequence of this practice which allowed the husband on the slightest pretext to level an accusation against his wife' (Mace: 248).

Anxiety over the first born might naturally be higher, for the woman may have been pregnant at the time of her marriage or, as in Sarah's case, a long period of barrenness might be the cause of suspicion (Gordon 1965). The whole question of legitimacy was double headed, for not only did the father secure immortality through legitimate progeny, but the first born son stood to inherit from the father. Obviously, it was not something to be trifled with. It is interesting to note in this connection that all first born sons in Genesis were passed over, for favor, inheritance or blessing, beginning with Cain.

If the life engendering ability is male then it is transferred from father to son. The son also possesses this ability and therefore as he matures he becomes a potential threat to the father's authority. This theme is the primary reason given for infanticide in the Greek stories, but is it also perhaps the rationale behind the command for obedience? The death penalty could be invoked for disobedience. The authority of the father was taken to its extreme literal limit in Greek and Roman society where the father had power of life and death over his children. He could dispose of them with impunity provided it was done by the eighth day. Infanticide by the father was not considered a crime until the fourth century AD, yet if a woman were found guilty of it she was tortured and put to death. Obviously it was an exercise of prerogative. Abraham, in taking Isaac without consulting Sarah, executed the prerogative of father-right.

The eighth day was significant. In Hebrew tradition it was the day for the sacrifice of the first born animals, and also the day on which

circumcision was performed. Perhaps both might be seen as symbolic substitutions for the child. In Christianity it became the day of Baptism, of being accepted into a family in which God was the father. Unbaptised children were thought to suffer eternal damnation in Hell; one might suggest that this is a projection of infanticidal impulses onto God. So-called illegitimate children have throughout history suffered from the sins of the fathers by being stigmatized and ignored, and deprived of emotional and financial support.

David Bakan, a twentieth-century psychologist, has also seen a connection between paternity and the story of the 'sacrifice of Isaac'. But he sees in the story redemptive possibilities; for the symbolic substitutions mitigate and control infanticidal impulses. In fact, he says 'The essence of Judaism and Christianity is the management of the infanticidal impulse. . . and a binding on the father against acting out the impulse' (Bakan 1974). I would suggest that it has been perpetuated on a grander scale. For what Bakan has not seen is that the impulse was provoked by and based on an erroneous conception of paternity, an erroneous view of conception. The symbolic substitutions, while surely a gain for humanity, do not really change but perpetuate the basic premise; that the child is the *appropriate* sacrifice.

Seed and soil, as a metaphor of conception, is deeply embedded in our culture. Not only has it been a powerful influence in shaping attitudes toward the sexes, but it has also been elaborated in sophisticated religious, philosophical and psychological speculation, from Aristotle to Freud. The ovum was not discovered until the nineteenth century; yet even today the metaphor of seed/soil is perpetuated in explanations of conception to children, in popular songs,¹⁹ and in the media. The implications beyond the purely biological one have not even begun to permeate our consciousness.

Let me begin to sum up this discussion. I think the story of the 'sacrifice of Isaac' is profound and central to our religious tradition and our culture. I think its meaning is to be found not in the ending of the practice of child sacrifice but rather in the establishment of father-right. I think the literal enactment and the symbolic transformations proceed from the same basic misunderstanding, the view of conception in which the father is the primary engendering one. I suggest the story functions to establish the authority of the father; this idea of paternity forms the basis of father-right, the foundation of patriarchy.

The genius of the Hebrew people could then be seen to lie in their powers of abstraction and symbolization. The idea of paternity was lifted from its concrete manifestation and transposed into the symbolic plane—as the essence of God. The aniconic tendency of the Hebrews has long been noted as a distinguishing feature of their religion. But visual images and idols could be dispensed with. The metaphor or verbal image is far more powerful because it establishes meaning on two levels.

In the Bible Israel is identified either with God's first born or with woman. Israel's misfortunes are interpreted as God's punishment for disobedience or for playing the harlot. The metaphors imply that God is to be understood as husband and father. And in early Christianity, at least, God's *seed* is the spermatic word, usually identified with his son the Christ. In the story of the 'sacrifice of Isaac' it is not a human father nor a father god implying there might be mother gods, brother and sister gods but God the Father who demands the sacrifice and then later offers his only son. The story functions to establish the authority of God the Father. The authority becomes omnipresent but invisible. This, more than anything, *legitimizes* the patriarchal way of life. Although the revelation of paternity occurred at a particular time in history, to the Hebrews it revealed the way things had been from the beginning. The abstract idea of conception and paternity was taken all the way back to Creation. No wonder there are no accounts in Genesis of the wars of the new gods against the old in which patriarchal authority was won. The revelation to the symbolic Abraham changed the course of history in two directions—it colored the future, which is our legacy, but clouded the face of the past. It became the metaphorical framework for the re-interpretation of primeval history as well as that within which history would unfold.

I am tempted to speculate further and ask how much the idea of seed, the transmission of the essence of the father to the son, from generation to generation, had to do with the development of the concept of history. For history as we know it, has been primarily the record of the events of one people, one religious tradition, and one sex.

Notes

1. The 'break' means that the primeval stories were more general, deriving from Mesopotamia, while the patriarchal stories were more specifically the Hebrews' own early history.

2. Archaeological evidence indicates that 'the end of the EB 2 period is marked in Southern and Western Anatolia by a catastrophe of such magnitude... that nearly every village was deserted and never again occupied'. Furthermore, the earlier population 'seems to have been of pre-Indo-European stock, or rather speech, practising a type of agricultural fertility religion in which a goddess played a predominant part'. I suggest that many of the changes are due to the influence of these invaders both in the Near East and in Greece. The destruction is true also for N. Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine, though in the latter case because of invasion of nomads from the desert.

3. I wish to make clear the distinction between the religious rite of child sacrifice in which the child victim, generally male, was required to be 'without blemish' and taken from among the aristocracy, if not the king; and the practice of allowing deformed infants to die at birth, a custom some 'primitive' peoples may allow. Infanticide has also been practiced as a means of disposing of excess population in which case the victims are most often female. Needless to say, the latter practice has occurred in historical times in patriarchal societies and is known to have been practiced in India until the nineteenth century.

4. Evidence for widespread practice of child sacrifice is confined to the first millenium BC. This is not, however, to deny that instances of it occurred earlier. Jephthah's daughter is a prime example.

5. This puts Abraham in a category apart from Agamemmnnon or Jephthah; as well as Saul who would have sacrificed Jonathan had not the people protested (1 Sam. 14).

6. Kierkegaard also places Abraham in a separate category from Agamemmnnon and Jephthah for reasons similar to Philo. It may be significant that Agamemmnnon and Jephthah are more comparable in time, and both sacrificed daughters.

7. To my mind, the idea of being devoted first to God, or an ideal substituted for God, and secondly to people, provides a structure which allows for war.

8. Either he identifies in some way with God or he is irrelevant. 'There is something divine in the father... and something fatherly in God' suggests that the ambiguity is resolved most likely by identification.

9. Mosca believes that the Bible does protest too much in its desire to distinguish the Israelites from other Canaanites.

10. See also entry for Kapparrah rite in 14th century.

11. Esp. pp. XX, 24, 27, 104 and 138. It was during this time that the

'ashes of Isaac' began to be worn on foreheads on fast days, implying that Isaac was indeed burned.

12. Cited in Spiegel, *Last Trial* (see footnote pp. xii-xiii).

13. I think not. I suggest that it is an attempt to combine two different traditions; one deriving from an agricultural society, and the other from a nomadic one. It is quite likely that this is behind the Cain and Abel story.

14. I chose the *Theogony* precisely because it is a theological work and records how a new religion was inaugurated, although there are other stories which may appear to be more closely parallel; in particular that of Athamas who set out to sacrifice his son Phrixis. At the last moment a golden ram flew down and rescued Phrixis, carrying him off to Colchis at the east end of the Black Sea. Here Phrixis sacrificed the ram and hung the fleece on a tree guarded by a dragon. It was this fleece that Jason went in search of several generations later. This story, or that of Abraham in reverse order, could have traveled via Colchis, Boghazkoy, Kültepe to Haran.

15. *Italics mine.*

16. The stone enshrined in the Kaa'ba at Mecca is in Muslim tradition the stone upon which Abraham intended to sacrifice Ishmael. Previously the stone was sacred to a female deity.

17. See also n. 18.

18. The implications for the 'mystery' of the Christian Trinity should be obvious.

19. A recent example is a 1976 song, 'You're having my baby', by pop singer Paul Anka.

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ANTI-COVENANT

Ann Marmesh

Introduction

An essential principle of narratological theory is that the 'aim of textual analysis is not to account for the process of writing but for the conditions of the process of reception' (Bal 1985: 49). Fabulae within stories are arranged in texts in order to convey ideology. How one receives this ideology is dependent upon one's sympathy or antipathy with the elements of the fabula (*ibid.*: 50). As readers and 'receivers' of texts, each of us is vulnerable, in some degree, to the process of mythification. Barthes defines mythification as 'forms of representation that naturalize certain meanings, eternalize the present state of the world' (Bal 1985: 31).

Bal explains that the process of mythification serves the interests of the dominating class (1984: 342). It is possible to trace both the anthropological norms and the narratological structure of the Genesis texts in order to examine this domination. Anthropology helps one to see the social rules which were conditions of the fulfillment of the covenant in Genesis 11–35. By studying kinship patterns it becomes clear that women were used by men to ensure the continuity of the covenant. Yet kinship theory does not explain the deviations from the normative rules which occur in the text. Narratology allows one to see and interpret the deviations. These deviations occur in three different types of events: women being exchanged according to rules which do not fit neatly into structural patterns, autonomous acts of self-care and self-pleasuring by women.

These deviations, in addition to the centrality of the matriarchs' active roles in covenant-making, lead one to question the unquestioning acceptance of the narratives as stories of male-mastery

and male-bonding. The unity of the theme of covenant dissolves, becoming more difficult to establish in the face of numerous deviations. Each of the three forms of deviations will be explored as they occur in Genesis 11–35.

*The Necessity of Using Anthropology and Narratology in
Understanding the Theme of 'Covenant'*

The theme of 'covenant' in Genesis 11–35 is illuminated by an interaction with anthropology and more specifically, Lévi-Strauss's kinship theory. Biblical scholars use kinship theory to trace the social rules embedded in the theme of covenant; a theme central to Jewish and Christian religion. 'Covenant', in the Hebrew Bible, is derived from the Akkadian root, *biritu*, meaning 'fetter'. The word is used as a direct object of a number of verbs to designate the establishment or breach of a covenant. To 'cut a covenant for (or with)' is the phrase most frequently used in the Hebrew Bible (Buttrick 1962: 715). The essence of 'covenant' is summarized in Gen. 17.1–2:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly'.

Recent biblical scholarship has demonstrated the usefulness of kinship theory in understanding the structure of the patriarchal narratives (Oden 1983; Donaldson 1980). In order to employ kinship theory most effectively, the scholars argue that one must make a diachronic *and* synchronic analysis of the text. Since the covenant between Yahweh and the fathers is narrated genealogically, it seems most obvious to employ a diachronic reading of the text. A reader's focus is assumed to be on the chronological movement of the covenant as it passes from father to legitimate heir. Thus, diachronic reading emphasizes descent and fulfillment. However, a synchronic reading yields more data; data which add complexity and depth to a diachronic understanding. A synchronic reading focuses one's attention on the necessity of a legitimate alliance between wife and husband. A legitimate marital alliance precedes or undergirds the actor portrayed as the legitimate heir. Donaldson has argued that a contradiction exists in the patriarchal narratives: the 'right' sons must become heirs but the 'right' women (wives) are barren. From a synchronic perspective, one can identify a tension in the text

imposed by the threat of 'barrenness' to the continuity of the covenant. Synchronicity allows the women to become actors as central to the text as fathers and sons.

Steinberg (1984) asserts that the matriarchs' centrality to the narratives justifies a renaming of the family cycles. The 'Abraham' and 'Jacob' cycles should become the 'Sarah-Hagar' and 'Rebekah' cycles. The women are most instrumental in working out the problems of family disharmony or disequilibrium (1984: 178). Also, the covenant's continuity hinges upon the procreative powers of the women. In fact, Steinberg's analysis raises the question of the potential power women had in their 'barrenness'. It is well known that barrenness is portrayed as a state women mourned. However, we can speculate that these matriarchs may have been resisting their childbearing function or at least withholding it as leverage in the power dynamics of patriarchal culture. Such resistance could have been redefined as 'barrenness'. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the covenant could not be fulfilled without women and that the women acted to keep the covenant descending. Superficially, this involvement could be read as women asserting personal power. However, it is not saying something new to assert that women are powerful because they ease family disharmony and bear children. These have been stereotypical female functions historically and do not readily correlate to significant political and cultural power.

Donaldson's analysis resembles Steinberg's yet offers a necessary qualifying of the matriarchs' centrality. Through the use of Lévi-Strauss's kinship theory she detects, in Genesis 11-35, a struggle to mediate between two unacceptable forms of marriage—those which are incestuous and those which are exogamous (1980: 79). The most acceptable form of marriage is an endogamous (related) but not identical (incestuous) alliance. According to Lévi-Strauss, the elementary structure of kinship is matrilineal cross-cousin marriage (mccm).¹ Mccm allows for 'generalized exchange' between groups: 'wife givers cannot be wife-takers; a group cannot give women to a group from which it has taken women' (Donaldson 1980: 79). Patrilineal cross cousin marriage (pccm) allows for 'restricted exchange': 'we give you women, you give us women'. Parallel cousins (pc) are considered to be in the same kinship group and thus no real exchange can occur between groups. Lastly, incest is considered most dysfunctional because there is no exchange and women are not set up in oppositional relationship to one another; all family roles and statuses stay the same.

Donaldson skilfully traces the marital alliances in Genesis 11–35. She discovers that the chronicity and type of barrenness/fertility in each matriarch is related to her kinship status. Sarah is Abraham's half-sister. She is barren the longest and must, at first, rely on a foreign woman for childbearing. Hagar is foreign and fertile. Sarah is incestuous and barren. Rebekah is Isaac's patrilateral parallel cousin (she is Nahor's granddaughter; Nahor is Isaac's father's brother). Thus, she is barren but becomes pregnant earlier in her life *and* conceives twins. Donaldson discovers that in the third cycle, Rachel and Leah are both Jacob's patrilateral cross-cousins and matrilineal cross-cousins. Donaldson asks us to look closely at the genealogy:

As with Sarah and Rebekah, a double relationship exists between Rachel and Leah and Jacob. In addition to being matrilineal cross-cousins or the daughters of Jacob's mother's brother, Rachel and Leah are also the daughters of Jacob's grandfather's (Abraham's) sister. Abraham's brother Nahor married Milcah, his brother's (Haran's) daughter. Milcah, then, is Abraham's 'sister' in the sense that she is his parallel niece (11.29). Rachel and Leah are, therefore, Jacob's patrilateral cross-cousins because they are descendants of Nahor and Milcah. Hence, one of them is 'legitimate' because of her matrilineal cross-cousin relationship to Jacob; the other is barren because of her patrilateral cross-cousin relationship to Jacob (1980: 84).

Leah is fertile from the start which symbolically reflects the legitimacy of mccm; Rachel is barren at first but then bears Joseph and Benjamin. Her initial barrenness reflects the illegitimacy of pccm. Donaldson concludes that mccm most adequately mediates between the extremes of incest and exogamy. By being closely related to Jacob, Rachel and Leah are 'correct' but not so closely related as to be 'sisters' (the term used for parallel cousins) (1980: 84). Hence, twelve legitimate heirs are born. Dinah, the eleventh of thirteen children born to Jacob and the only female offspring, is not counted as a legitimate heir. In fact, in the narrative, prior to Benjamin's birth as the thirteenth child, the narrator states that Jacob, 'arose and took his two wives, his two maids and his eleven children...' (Gen. 32.22). This error in addition is an ellipsis in the narrative which further signifies that female children do not 'count'.

These biblical scholars employing kinship theory have identified an unmistakable logic of events. There is a definite parallel between Lévi-Strauss's 'elementary structure of kinship' theory and the

Genesis 11–35 genealogy. As marriage alliances increasingly conform to the mccm rule, there is an increase in legitimate heirs. This is a fascinating, yet disturbing discovery. We gain insight into the rule-governed behavior in what Lévi-Strauss calls 'primitive' cultures. We begin to understand important social patterns. However, matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is dependent upon males making alliances through the exchange of women. Thus, Lévi-Strauss's kinship theory does not alter, but reinforces, the norm of patriarchal domination of women.

Strauss's kinship theory is premised upon the rejection of traditional psychological and sociological explanations of the incest taboo. He asserts that the incest taboo is a social 'intervention' which mediates between nature and culture. Incest prohibits the exchanges and alliances of 'goods' which are necessary to the survival and flourishing of culture. Therefore, incest is 'taboo' so that culture would persist. In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, he writes:

Man's (*sic*) sexual life is itself external to the group, firstly, in being the highest expression of animal nature, and the most significant survivor of instinct, and secondly, in that its ends are to satisfy individual desires, which, as is known, hold little respect for social conventions, and specific tendencies, which... also go beyond society's own ends. However, if the relationships between the sexes represents an overflow of culture into nature, in another way sexual life is one beginning of social life in nature, for the sexual is man's (*sic*) only instinct requiring the stimulation of another (1969: 12).

His claim that men need women to stimulate them (and not vice versa) justifies his view of the value of women. Women are the means of reciprocal exchange which form alliances between men. He states further:

... Reciprocity has maintained its fundamental function (from 'primitive' to contemporary culture) on the one hand because women are the most precious possession, but above all because women are not primarily a sign of social value, but a natural stimulant of the only instinct which can be deferred, and consequently the only one for which, in the act of exchange, and through the awareness of reciprocity, the transformation from the stimulant to the sign can take place, and defining by this fundamental process, the transformation from nature to culture, assume the character of an institution (1969: 62–63) (parentheses mine).

As stimulant and sign, women are both the motivation and means for male bonding. According to his theory, women as autonomous actors in social reality are non-existent.

Lévi-Strauss, and the biblical scholars using his theory, are attempting to demonstrate the structural correlation between kinship systems and myth. The work of these scholars confirms Bal's observation that:

Structuralists often work from the assumption that the series of events that is presented in a story must answer to the same rules as those controlling human behavior since a narrative would otherwise be impossible to understand. If human behavior is taken as the criterion for describing events, then the question immediately arises of the function of the instruments of action, the actors (1985: 6).

By looking closely at the instruments of action in Genesis 11-35, one also finds contradictions to the rules identified by structural kinship theory. As a result, one can de-naturalize the meaning of women as passive stimulants and signs and men as masterful, virile patriarchs.

Using narratology, three forms of rule deviations will be examined. First, we will examine the rule of wife-sister exchange which allows for covenants to be made without respect to 'legitimate heirs'. Secondly, fabulae which depict men as acquiescing in the presence of female procreative power will be analyzed. Lastly, using the technique of focalization, instances of female self-pleasuring will be brought to the foreground of the narrative.

The Sister-Wife Masquerade and the Rape of Dinah as Earnest Money in Covenant-Making

There are several acts of men exchanging women which do not indicate any motive of conformity to 'correct' marriage for 'correct' heir-producing. Instead, wives and sisters are used as bargaining chips in the acquiring of land, riches and male self-protection.

There are three instances of the same fabula in Gen. 12.10-20; 20.2-7; and 26.6-11. The fabula elements in Genesis 12 and 26 are identical except for the replacement of Abraham and Sarah with Isaac and Rebekah. The patriarchs are seeking refuge from famine-struck lands. In Genesis 12, Abram prepares Sarah for entry into Egypt:

When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai, his wife, 'I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account. When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians said that the woman was very beautiful. And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, he-asses, menservants, maidservants, she-asses and camels. But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house because of Sarai, Abram's wife (May and Metzger 1977: 15).

The footnote to this passage in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* repeats the ideology in the narrative itself:

God's promise of a posterity was temporarily eclipsed in Egypt where Sarah was *almost taken* into Pharaoh's harem. The narrative does not moralize about (Abram's) white lie but rather portrays the Lord's rescue of Sarah from the jeopardy. . . (italics mine) (*ibid.*).

Here the commentator obscures the narrative itself, minimalizing Sarah's abduction and emphasizing God's mercy. Pharaoh most certainly had abducted Sarah into his harem through intercourse or God would not have sent the severe affliction upon his house. In other Genesis texts, it is consistent that God saves houses from affliction if there is *no* act of sexual immorality.

In Genesis 20, the fabula is repeated except the foreign authority is not Pharaoh but Abimelech, King of Gerar. Abraham declares Sarah his sister and Abimelech takes Sarah.

Before Abimelech 'approaches' Sarah, God intervenes via Abimelech's dream, warning him of her true status. The narrative reads:

Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, 'Lord, wilt thou slay an innocent people? Did he not say himself to me, "She is my sister?" And she herself said, "he is my brother"'. In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this. Then God said to him in a dream, 'Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me, therefore I did not let you touch her' (*ibid.*: 23).

Twice the words 'innocence' and 'integrity' are repeated. The divine speaker confirms Abimelech's self-justification. The fact that Sarah

was taken into his house is completely dismissed by the complicity of the Lord and Abimelech. Later in the same chapter, when Abimelech reproaches Abraham for the potential sin which may have ensued from Abraham's life, Abraham explains that he lied because he thought, 'there is no fear of God in this place and they will kill me because of my wife' (v. 11). Sarah is protector of Abraham at her own expense. In Genesis 26, Isaac repeats the exact pattern of his father. Again, Abimelech sees the truth of the situation before laying with Rebekah. Similarly, he reproaches Isaac and Isaac justifies his life with his father's line, 'Because I thought, lest I die because of her'. After each masquerade, the patriarchs are sent on their way with goods from the Egyptians or Canaanites.

There is a strange logic in this fabula. The Canaanites are depicted as evil (not God-fearing). Yet, they are aware of the taboo against sleeping with someone else's wife. Perhaps this is why they were thought to kill husbands; if the husband is dead, no one has legal rights to the woman and they are free to own her. However, the logic is more complicated. In the patriarch's mind, masquerading one's wife as a sister avoids being killed. They are relieved to have something to exchange for the assurance of safety and riches. By making the exchange of a supposed sister, Abraham and Isaac do not condemn wife-abduction. Thus, they are complicit in breaking the taboo. There is no felt personal guilt nor acts of divine intervention condemning their breaking of the taboo. Then, when the foreign authority figure is about to (or does) wreak havoc on his own household, it becomes a terrible sin to have completed the exchange. In the end, if the women had actually been a sister, intercourse would not have been sinful. There is a duplicity in the taboo. When wife-abduction benefits the patriarchs, it is allowed. If wife-abduction threatens the well-being of the male household, it is disallowed. God intervenes, or one male negotiates with the other, and the patriarch goes off with more riches than before. The logic of the fabula is twisted in a way that absolves the males from being condemned or condemning themselves for the trading of women for favors. Furthermore, when the men resolve the problem, it is declared ultimately that, 'because of Sarah' calamity had occurred (Gen. 10.17; 20.18). This blaming of the victim is underscored in the description of Sarah as beautiful (Gen. 10.11). Rebekah as fair to look upon (Gen. 24.15; 26.7) and Rachel as beautiful (Gen. 29.17). Beauty and barrenness are juxtaposed to foreignness and fertility.

This juxtaposition also deviates from the idea that the mccm kinship rule is the main determinant of a 'right wife'. Not only must a woman's kinship status be the right balance between incest and exogamy; she must also be beautiful; so beautiful that she would cause trouble for her husband. A woman's beauty thus becomes a negative quality; a deficit akin to barrenness. This degradation of the power inherent in female presence creates a further bargaining chip. The woman is now a double-burden (beautiful and barren), thus the husband can strengthen his justification of wife exchange (giving a wife over for rape in exchange for safety) and his need for additional wives; wives who are fertile. As a result, each ideo-story ends with one of the guilty males blaming their victim.

Nahum Sarna, biblical scholar, discovered one explanation for the logic of these texts in the Nuzi archives. There are documents in the archives which describe the legal transaction of 'wife-sistership' between men in the ancient Hurrian culture. Sistership had no tie to blood relations; it was solely a legal status. Men could sell their wives as sisters or sell their sisters as wives. Sarna claims that the dual status 'endowed women with superior privileges and protection, over and above those of an ordinary wife' (1970: 170-1). He then compares the Sarah-Rebekah story to the institution of wife-sistership:

In light of the situation, it must be assumed that Sarah and Rebekah were both holders of this wife-sister privilege, peculiar to the society from which they came and in which the legal aspects of their marriages were negotiated. The patriarchal narratives have faithfully recorded the unique institution of wife-sistership. However, in the course of transmission, until finally incorporated into the scriptural story, the very uniqueness of the socio-legal institution of wife-sistership was bound to be misunderstood in the context of an entirely different civilization and the patriarchal events connected with it were completely reinterpreted and reused for a different purpose. They have been worked into a narrative that gives a critical judgment on Canaanite moral standards (1980: 103).

However, a comment on the moral behavior of Abraham and Isaac is forfeited. The 'privileged dual status' of women is actually 'dual usage'. As wives masquerading as sisters they obtain riches and safety for their husbands. As sisters discovered to be wives they create an indebtedness on the part of the abductor to the husband

who lent his wife in the first place. Both ways, the husband gains and the abductor is off the hook. The woman remains degraded as an object. Her beauty and status initially attracts and protects, then it becomes the cause of calamity.

Genesis 34 narrates the rape of Dinah ('and when Shechem the son of Hamor... saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humbled her', (v. 2). By comparing Genesis 34 with the fabula in Genesis 26 we discover explicit covenant-making apart from any pattern explicated in Strauss's kinship theory. Michael Fishbane notes that Genesis 26 and 34 appear to be anomalous in the Rebekah (he calls it Jacob) cycle:

The first, Gen. 26 interrupts the early events in the relationship between Jacob and Esau, separates the two etymologies of the name Jacob, and has no relationship with deception and flight reported in Gen. 27... in Gen. 34 we have a chapter with no apparent connection in the narrative context. This chapter revolves around an episode in Shechem involving the sons of Jacob, Simon and Levi when they avenged the rape of their sister, Dinah. This piece is neither connected with Gen. 33, which treats the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau, nor with Gen. 35 which is the concluding of the Jacob cycle (1975: 23-24).

However, he skillfully discovers parallels between both chapters which explains their initial 'anomalous' chronological and thematic positioning:

As regards Gen. 26, we may first note the leitmotif of deception: Isaac deceives Abimelech with regard to Rebekah and later Isaac charges the Philistines with deception... In Gen. 34, like 26 and elsewhere in the cycle, there is also an event involving deception. Both texts involve relations with the uncircumcised autochthonous population of Canaan. In Gen. 26, the action was motivated by a fear of intercourse; the deception on the part of Simon and Levi was because of the fact that Shechem Hamor had raped Dinah. As part of their deception they recommended covenantal ties. As noted, the episode with the Philistines in Gen. 26 concludes with the establishment of covenantal relations (1975: 25).

In conclusion, he states that these insertions act as interludes which enhance the 'generative' power of the text. In other words, they act as repetitions of ideo-stories which condone manipulation of and violence against women for the sake of male bonding. Covenants are made between men through rape, pillaging the 'uncircumscribed' and adultery.

Women and Covenant Mastery

The essence of covenant-making appears to be the multiplication of males. In fact, a specific symbol is used in the Bible to signify male mating. Nahum Sarna states that the 'thigh is symbolic of the reproductive organs, the seat of pro-creative powers' (1970: 170-71). In Genesis 24, when Abraham wants his slave to fetch a wife for Isaac, he commands the slave to, 'put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by the Lord. . . to go to my country, to my kindred to take a wife for my son'. Interestingly, when Jacob is finished fathering, he wrestles with an angel who touches the hollow of Jacob's thigh and puts it out of joint (Gen. 32.35).

However, contrary to male stimulation of male 'procreative powers', Genesis has instances of males sleeping, impotently, as the covenant is carried on without them. In fact, as men sleep, women embody the covenant by emerging into the foreground of the narrative. Bal confirms the potency of female presence in claiming that 'the sleep of the male is seen as *conditio sine qua non* of a woman's access to her femininity' (Bal 1986: 119).

In Gen. 2.21 and 15.2 the characteristic of sleeping is shared by Adam and Abram. Both passages are events in which God is initiating a covenant with the men. Gen. 2.21 reads:

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to man.

The above passage from Genesis is preceded by God bringing beasts and birds to the man to see if they would be suitable companions for him. Inevitably, a woman must be created, nothing else suffices. Likewise, in Genesis 15, Abram is asked by God to bring beasts and birds to the altar to sacrifice. The text then reads:

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and lo, a dread and a darkness fell upon him. . . (v. 12)

Five verses later, after explaining some of the trials Abraham's people will have, God assures Abraham:

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces (of sacrificed animals). On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying, 'To your descendants, I give this land'.

A troubling parallel to this scene exists in Judg. 19.29 wherein a concubine is divided into twelve pieces and sent throughout all the territory of Israel. Are beasts, birds and women of the same class of actants in that they are direct objects of the verb, 'to cut' as in 'to cut a covenant?' As such, they do not exhibit mastery over the covenant; they become the covenant.

However, we do have two undeniable examples in Genesis of women's sexuality defining and controlling the conditions of the covenant. Women are not sacrificed. Rather, they create life in the presence of sleeping men. Eve, by definition of her name, is the mother of all living things. Adam takes no initiative in her creation.

Secondly, Lot's daughters are another example of women displaying mastery; they ensure the ongoing of the tribes in Genesis 19. The narrative reads:

And the first-born said to the younger, 'Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come into us after the manner of all the earth. Come let us make our father drink wine and we will lie with him, that we may preserve our offspring through our father. So they made their father drink wine that night; and the first born went in and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down and when she arose.

The entire sequence is repeated again with the second daughter. The women are concerned about *their* offspring, not their father's. Here we have a reversal of power from the narrative in Gen. 19.8-9 in which Lot was willing to exchange his daughters to appease the Sodomite men. Lot is asleep from drunkenness in this scene. Like Adam and Abraham before him, he has no mastery over the act of covenant-making.

Female Self-Pleasuring in the Patriarchal Narratives

In the first family cycle, 'Sarah-Hagar', Sarah does not appear to be as concerned about conceiving as Abraham and the Lord. In a conversation between Abraham and the Lord, Sarah is first portrayed in the background of the text and then comes forward as the focalizer:

The Lord said, 'I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son'. And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old (bala),

advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' The Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son'. But Sarah denied saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'No but you did laugh' (May and Metzger, *op. cit.*: 20-21).

Sarah does not show any doubtful concern about conceiving a child (i.e. continuing the covenant). Instead, she asks, 'Shall I have pleasure?' The word for pleasure, *edna*, means sensual pleasure. Biblical commentaries explain away Sarah's laughter and question by attributing both to incredulity. One commentator writes:

It has been considered a special nicety that Sarah's reflection is *unexpectedly stripped* of its bluntness when repeated by God; the expressions *bala* for the 'decay' of old clothes, and *edna*, 'sensual pleasure', are not repeated. The narrative *reaches its climax* in the statement, 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' This word reposes in the story like a precious stone in a priceless setting, and its significance surpasses the cozy patriarchal milieu of the narrative; it is a heuristic witness to God's omnipotent saving will. The narrator works out the contrast very sharply: The unbelieving and perhaps evil laugh, and now this word which mistrusts Yahweh's omnipotence (von Rad 1972: 207) (emphasis mine).

This reader of the text repeats the same punishing of Sarah via the sexually aggressive language he uses in his interpretation. If we take Sarah as the focalizer in this text, we quickly see that the divine speaker avoids and rewords her question, just as the biblical commentator does. Sarah's laughter and question explicitly address her body and sexuality. Laughter is a human response to the release of tension. It is a human, spontaneous reaction to and a linguistic euphemism for orgasm. Laughter here may be more related to sexual pleasure than to incredulity. Further evidence which supports this speculation is found in Gen. 21.5-7, the part of the narrative concerning Isaac's birth:

Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, 'God has made laughter for me; every one who hears will laugh all over me'. And she said, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have borne him a son in old age'.

Interestingly, the root of the name Isaac is *shq* which means 'laugh'. Commentators use this word motif to explain that in this passage Sarah's laughter means a joyful expression rather than incredulity. Sarah is joyful over the heir being born. However Sarah's laughter can also be interpreted as related to suckling. Contemporary knowledge of 'suckling' or breastfeeding lends insight to Sarah's comment. Women are capable of becoming sexually aroused to the point of orgasm while breastfeeding. Oxytocin, the hormone that triggers orgasm (and labor), is also responsible for the letdown of milk when stimulated by the baby's suckling (Pincus and Sanford 1984: 400). Again, Sarah's focus is on her bodily experience—suckling her child. She is not concerned with the 'accomplishment' of having a child nor the child's future as an heir. Nor does she need to rely on Abraham for sexual pleasure. The mother-child relationship becomes its own source of gratification.

A third example of female self-pleasuring appears in Gen. 30.14–16. Mandrakes are exchanged between Leah and Rachel. This exchange is a reversal of the normative male-to-male exchange. Rachel exchanges Jacob to Leah for mandrakes:

In the days of wheat harvest Rueben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, 'Give me, I pray, some of your son's mandrakes'. But she said to her, 'Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?' Rachel said, 'Then he may lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes'. When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him, and said, 'You must come into me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes'.

The footnote for this passage in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* states that in antiquity, mandrakes, roots of a potato-like plant, were thought to have aphrodisiac properties which stimulated conception (May and Metzger *op. cit.*: 37). 'Aphrodisiac properties', however, have nothing to do with conception. 'Aphrodisiac' refers to properties which cause sexual excitement and pleasure. In the text cited above, there is no mention of Rachel desiring conception. The text focuses solely on Leah and our imagination is left to conjecture what Rachel did with the mandrakes. Perhaps she found them to be an acceptable, if not preferable, substitute for intercourse with Jacob. Her willingness to exchange the potentiality of Jacob for mandrakes emphasizes her lack of concern about conception. Furthermore, later in the narrative

(Gen. 30.22) it is God who 'harkened to Rachel' and 'opened her womb'. Relying on aphrodisiacs for conception would contradict the narrative's depiction of God being the only one with the authority to open wombs.

Conclusion

This narratological analysis surfaces textual evidence of taboo-breaking. First, covenants are not made solely on the basis of the 'elementary structure of kinship'. Particular birthrights do belong to particular heirs, yet much more than 'birthright' is involved in covenant-making. Covenant-making is a social mechanism for acquiring many forms of 'generative' powers including land, money, slaves and sexual favors. Lévi-Strauss is correct in stating that the 'sexual instinct. . . holds little respect for social conventions' (1969). Not even his kinship theory can contain these instinctual powers.

Secondly, men are 'natural stimulants' for women in these texts. Sarah is interested in Abraham's capacity to *please her*. Moreover, women disprove Lévi-Strauss's theory further by skillfully using stimulants for themselves which are literally, 'natural'.

In Genesis 11-35 there is, clearly, female presence. Yet, if we read the texts solely with a focus on male descent and the fulfillment of the covenant, we obscure such presence. Obedience to structural analysis is not unlike obedience to religious constructs, such as covenant. Covenants require 'processions'; processions from fathers to sons. Mary Daly speaks of the inherent danger to women which exists in a religious construct that signifies the 'multiplication of males':

Patriarchal society revolves around myths of processions. Earthly processions both generate and reflect the image of procession from and return to god the father. . . . Thus, in the symbol system there is a circular pattern/model for melted existence: separation from the return to the same immutable source. . . . Human males are eternally putting on the masks and playing the role of the Divine Persons. The mundane processions of sons have as their basic but unacknowledged and unattainable aim an attempted 'co-substantiality' with the father (Daly 1978: 37-38).

Ultimately, the goal of male processions is to deny female reality in the cosmos (Daly 1978: 38). Through the employment of narratology, we have been able to trace some of the after-life of patriarchal

patterning in the commentaries and scholarship in circulation today, in addition to seeing such patterning in the texts themselves. Narratology assists one in reversing denial of female reality, a reality which has been shown to be both tragically manipulated by men and powerfully lived through female mastery over and beyond the man-made 'fetters'.

Note

1. See Figures 1 and 2 for charts on Matrilateral Cross Cousin Marriage and the genealogy of Gen. 11-35.

Figure 1. Parallel and Cross-Cousins (Fox: 185; as cited in Donaldson: 80)

F=Father M=Mother B=Brother
S=Son D=Daughter Z=Sister

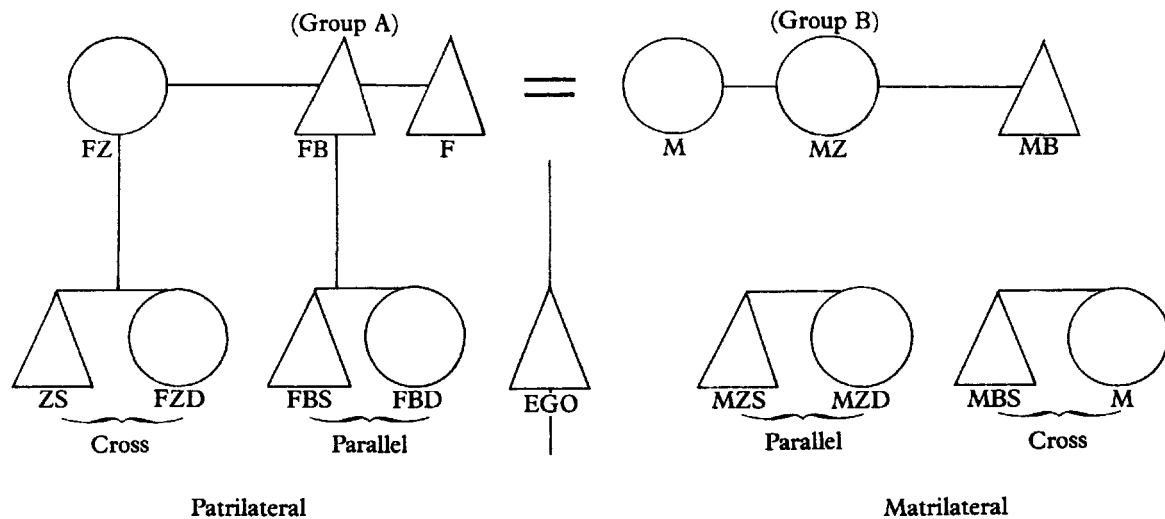
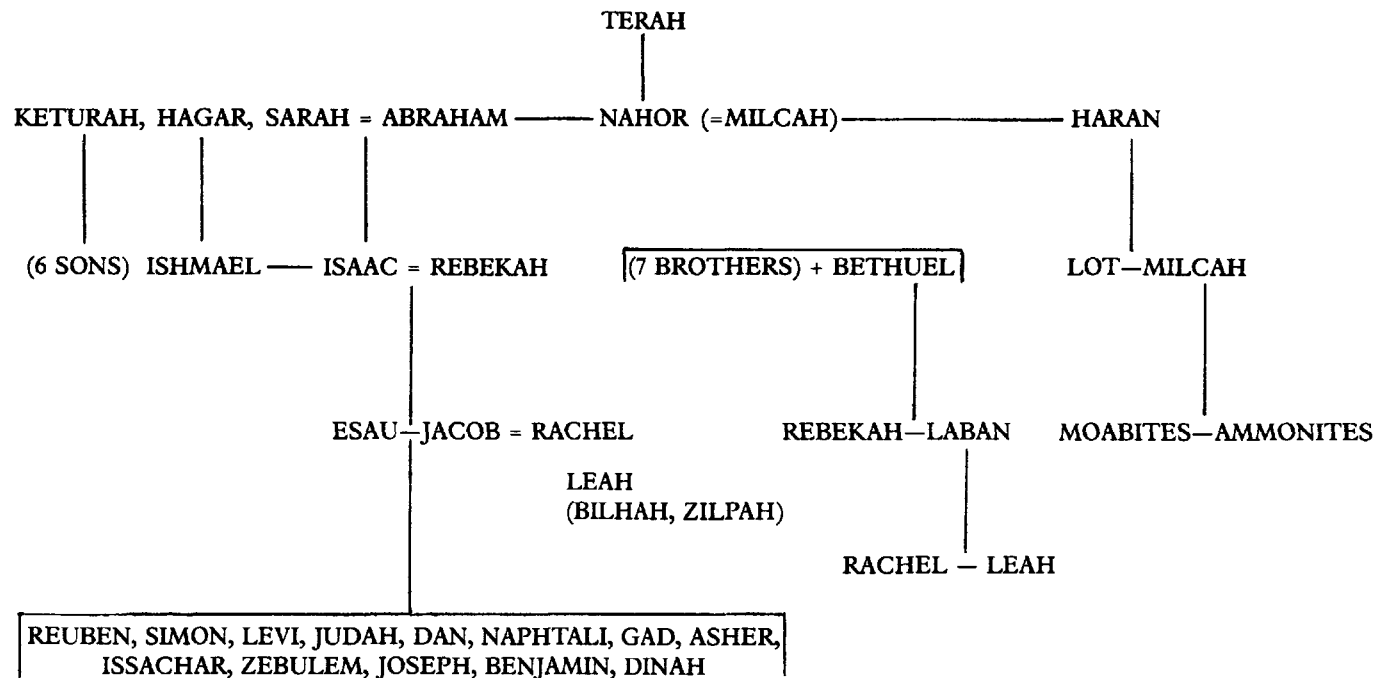


Figure 2: The Genealogies of the Patriarchs — Gen. 11.26—Gen. 35
(Donaldson: 77)



II

UNTIL I AROSE: THE EFFECT OF EFFECTIVE WOMEN

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DESIRE AND DANGER:
THE DRAMA OF BETRAYAL IN JUDGES AND JUDITH

Betsy Merideth

Ways of Reading

In this paper I will bring together two biblical stories which are not often compared. The Samson and Delilah story in Judges and the Judith and Holofernes story in the book of Judith have, in fact, marked similarities. In each, a woman uses her sexual desirability to harm a man, and yet the ways in which the Christian tradition has received and interpreted both the sexuality and the harm have been radically different. My comparison will focus on the notion of betrayal.

The impetus for my analysis is, first and foremost, the awareness that biblical narrative is still extremely influential as a model for gender stereotypes and human relation patterns.¹ The Bible contains a wealth of ideological representations of women and gender differences which have been used in many different ways throughout history. It is critically important to take seriously the paradigmatic quality of textual opposition, such as those based on gender, and uncover ideology not only in biblical narrative, but perhaps even more in the commentaries and traditional interpretations which so shape our readings of these texts.

Both stories have a long history of reception and interpretation in the Christian tradition, and, I will argue, these interpretations both reflect and have contributed to the deeply rooted cultural ideology that women's sexuality is dangerous to men. Through textual analysis on the level of fabula and focalization—two narratological terms which I will elucidate more fully later—I will look at the relationship between interpretation and text. The sense of drama

that is evoked in the reader is different in each story, a difference due to the use of focalization. By considering the sexual politics that underlie both the traditional interpretations of the stories as well as the stories themselves, and by refusing to subordinate the man/woman opposition to the politics of nationality that shape most readings, I will suggest that it is not only the 'negatively' interpreted stories that contain anti-woman ideologies. Rather, the interpretations which are 'positive' toward women are equally capable of representing women's sexuality as dangerous to men.

The method which I will use in my attempt to illuminate through comparison will be drawn from deconstruction, reader-reponse criticism, feminist criticism and narrative theory. My starting point, as I have suggested is a recognition of the power of biblical texts (that is, their interpretations) to shape our understanding of social relations, particularly in terms of gender. I am interested in looking at interpretation, especially of the Bible, from the standpoint of power: what is being legitimated by the interpretation, what are its concrete social effects, who is benefitting?

My interpretive method seeks to remain close to these questions of ideology and of praxis. I am less interested in presenting my own readings as somehow 'more true' to the text than I am with showing how interpretations often say more about the complex way the interpreter constructs and reflects his or her social reality than about the text itself.

To address this question of the relationship between the text and its interpretation (and, by extension, its history of reception), I have found the various approaches grouped under the heading 'reader-response criticism' to be a valuable corrective to the lack of hermeneutical consciousness sometimes found in structuralism. Many reader-reponse theorists claim that one cannot understand a text apart from its effects, and that it does not mean anything to talk of a text's meaning outside of its appropriation by the mind of a reader. Norman Holland's psychoanalytic model relates interpretation to individual psychological identity. His basic principle, which is then worked out in terms of defense mechanisms, adaptive strategies, systems of values, ways of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, is that 'all of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves' (Holland 1980: 124).²

If, for Holland, interpretation is a function of psychological identity, one may extend this notion into a consideration of the

sociological aspect. How do our readings and received interpretations reflect and then replicate cultural values and norms? If one takes seriously each reader's historical situatedness and the *Wirkungsgeschichte*³ of the biblical text she reads, one must consider the cultural context of the reader as a key factor in the reading process. In Wolfgang Iser's works, 'the realization (of the text by the reader) is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader' (1980: 50), and part of our perceived identity of self and other depends on what our culture gives us as possibilities, in terms of gender roles, and roles appropriate to other variables such as race and class.

Our readings are composed of our identities, not only because understanding itself is hermeneutical, but because the text itself has 'unwritten' parts, to a greater or lesser degree. Iser puts forth this idea in his account of the reader's active and creative participation in the reading process. In an essay entitled 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach', he explains how the textual gaps are filled in by each reader in her own way as she reads, thus implying a multitude of possibilities which are inexhaustible. With all texts 'the reading process is selective, and the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations. This is borne out by the fact that a second reading of a piece of literature often produces a different impression from the first' (1980: 55).

Iser points out that it is only with modern fiction that we are forced to become aware of our activity in supplying the missing textual links; 'with "traditional" texts this process was more or less unconscious' (*op. cit.*). I would add that the Bible lends itself to this attitude readily for two reasons. Firstly, those who perceive the Bible as in some sense the Word of God tend toward the presupposition that the meaning is somehow readily available on the surface of the text, and secondly, the spare style and lack of explicit psychological characterization and motivation in the narratives⁴ furnish a multitude of 'gaps' which a reader necessarily fills in, and, to reiterate Holland, the connections one creates reflect oneself.

Iser does not in this essay deal with the problems of the idea of a misreading: can misreading be said to exist? What are the criteria by which to adjudicate between readings? Are all variations of reading enrichments, or are some corrections and improvements on others? Sometimes a reading may be relativized by appealing to or making a case for textual ambiguity at a key point. The proposed reading may

come to be seen in terms of its relative probability; for example, one may argue readings that hinge on the ambiguous referent of a personal pronoun. This can amount to pointing out the textual gap and suggesting alternate ways of filling it. Misreadings one considers serious are, of course, often much more systematic and thus difficult to address.

Jonathan Culler suggests a conceptual inversion in which we see 'understanding (as) a special case of misunderstanding. It is misunderstanding whose misses do not matter' (1983: 176) or rather, 'whose misses have been missed' (178). This inversion challenges the error of conceiving misunderstanding as something which, theoretically, might be avoided. The notion of 'misses which do not matter' is provisional because what is perceived to matter or not undergoes a continual process of evaluation.

Interpreters are able to discover features and implications of a text that previous interpreters neglected or distorted... their own readings will be found wanting by later interpreters, who may astutely identify the dubious presuppositions or particular forms of blindness to which they testify (176).

What this inversion does is not so much to cast all readings into an abyss of relativism, but rather, as Culler points out, to

displace the question, leading one to consider what are the processes of legitimation, validation or authorization that produce differences among readings and enable one reading to expose another as a misreading (179).

Some structuralist approaches tend to view their methods as sufficiently objective in their foundations so as to avoid these 'subjective' issues of legitimation and psychological gap-filling. A post-Gadamerian conception of understanding, however, must confront the problematic nature of the idea of objective structures in a text. The identification of these structures can and does get caught in another twist of the hermeneutical circle: one reads and has an interpretation of the text before one decides which structural categories are relevant to the analysis.

For example, in an article entitled 'Samson's Dry Bones: A Structural Reading of Judges 13-16', James Freeman identifies a 'rhythmic distribution of events' (1982: 149) in which a four-part pattern is repeated numerous times over the course of the narrative. The pattern consists of a threat or act of destruction, an act of

personal gratification or pleasure, a question, and an act of betrayal. Freeman considers these elements to be the 'bare bones' of the story. This exemplifies the ambiguity of structuralism: the chosen structural categories may be 'objective' to a greater or lesser extent. The event of a death, the repetition of formulaic phrases: these things are less dependent on interpretation and are more 'in' the text. Freeman's last category, an act of betrayal, is highly problematic and depends on a particular understanding of what constitutes a betrayal. I will argue later that betrayal is a social construction which is not in any way independent of interpretation, and furthermore that the series of events between Samson and Delilah are complex and nuanced and not a self-evident betrayal as most commentators claim.⁵

In the case of Freeman and many other interpretations,⁶ The concept of betrayal allows them to draw parallels between the event of betrayal by Samson's wife (14.16-18) and by Delilah. This connection glosses over and ignores important differences; the second is interpreted in terms of the first precisely because betrayal is named as a structural element. The two—structural category and interpretation—reinforce each other circularly.

Michael Rifaterre attempts to include the reader in his still objective structural analysis by criticizing structuralist readings that use categories and patterns (for example, phonological and grammatical) that readers could not possibly be aware of. He asks, rhetorically, whether 'any structural system they are able to define in the poem is necessarily a poetic structure' (1980: 28). Although I consider this a valid corrective to structuralist excesses of abstraction, I would disagree with Rifaterre on the point of limiting poetic significance to reader awareness. On the contrary, I agree with theorist Mieke Bal that it is sometimes the elements which are not on the surface of the text, such as focalization or point of view, which are 'the most important, most penetrating, and most subtle means of manipulations' (1985: 116). Focalization is a concept in Bal's method of narrative analysis which refers to the implicit interpretation involved in the way that things or events are presented. It refers to 'the relation between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented' (100). It is similar to the familiar ideas of 'point of view' and 'perspective', but it differs in two important ways. One, Bal is concerned to draw an explicit distinction between the narrator and the vision expressed because 'it is possible, both in fiction and in reality, for one person to express the vision of another'

(101). The second difference, more important for my purposes, is that focalization has a verb form, 'to focalize', which draws our attention to the action and effect of focalization. The vision presented can have a strongly manipulative effect, and, as Bal says, 'a technical term will help us keep our attention on the technical side of such a means of manipulation' (102).

To become conscious of focalization as a crucial, pervasive element in a story is also to become aware of the distinction between *fabula* and story. I will draw on this distinction heavily in my analysis. A *fabula* is a 'series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors' (Bal 1985: 5), and a story is a *fabula* that is told in a certain way. Focalization is, for the author, one of her primary means of shaping a *fabula* into a story that is experienced by the reader in a distinctive way.

These two concepts, *fabula* and focalization, are important for my analysis because I will argue that the Delilah story and the Judith story share in many ways the same *fabula*, which has been focalized (or traditionally interpreted as focalized) through different actors; that is, Samson (the 'victim') in Judges, and Judith (the 'heroine') in the book of Judith. In both stories a woman uses her sexual wiles and desirability to 'betray' a man, leading to his death or downfall. I use the word 'betray' ironically because it is universally applied by commentators to Delilah, yet virtually never to Judith.

A comparison of these two stories offers an interesting opportunity to examine the interaction between text and reader vis à vis the nature of the dramatic tension evoked. On the one hand, the reader has certain expectations based on the manner in which the *fabula* is constructed and organized into a story. The way the reader reads, the response she has to the story: these are in large measure influenced (one might say manipulated) by the shape that the *fabula* takes in the particular story.

On the other hand, the deeper level of *fabula* still exists. In the case of my comparison, we can say that the two *fabulae* resemble each other in striking ways. Although traditional readings of the two stories have been as dissimilar as the *fabulae* are similar, one might also ask what messages or ideologies are inscribed at the level of *fabula*. That is, the theoretical layers between which one might distinguish in accounting for the process of reception include *fabula*, story, the identity of the reader, and the interpretation itself. Each of these levels contains distinct messages which may be highlighted or

obscured by those of the other levels. This discussion will attempt to hold together the tension between the similarity of fabula, and the dissimilarity of story and of interpretation (which are not identical) in order to come to a more subtle understanding of ideological effects that result from the interaction between text and reader.

The first question to be posed to the text is how have the various components of the fabula been ordered to make it into the particular stories in Judges and Judith? Bal suggests several principles which order the raw material of the fabula into aspects of a story: the actors and the locations are given specific characteristics, personalities and qualities; symbolic relationships between elements may be added; and the events are presented from a specific point of view (7).

One of the most obvious and important characteristics that has been given to the actors is nationality, and this, of course, has a great effect on the reader's perception of 'hero' and 'villain'. That is, these stories are part of the Christian and Jewish religious traditions, and so the fact that Samson and Judith are interpreted as focalizers is related to their being Israelites. However, I am hesitant to accept nationality as the sole important character aspect because I am not convinced, as many traditional commentators imply, that Judges 16 is focalized unambiguously through Samson.

The Logic of Betrayal

My analysis will try to look carefully at the text of chapter 16 itself, considered as drama, and the logic of the story, with special attention to the form of dramatic tension evoked. The first episode, 16.4-9, begins by stating that Samson loved a woman. The only information given about her is her name, Delilah, and her location, the valley of Sorek. We do not know much about their relationship, either; later we are given a clue about its duration when the narrator says 'day after day', so that we know they are together for longer than one or two nights. At some point in their relationship the lords of the Philistines come to her and propose a plan: that she entice him, and get knowledge of his strength and how they might subdue him; for this she will receive money. The lords imply that subduing him is contingent upon 'knowing' in both senses—through enticing him sexually, thus gaining knowledge of the secret of his strength.

Delilah's response to the lords is not given, but her question to Samson is curious, if one assumes that she has an interest in being

deceitful and treacherous. She says, 'Please tell me wherein your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you'. In that one sentence, she divulges the entire plan, not merely her part in it, which is to find out the secret of his strength. Samson's response, moreover, indicates that he has not misunderstood her question; he says, 'if *they* bind me with seven fresh bow-strings. . . then I shall become weak'. Delilah ties him with the fresh bowstrings that the Philistines brought to her, and says, in the formula she will repeat three more times, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' Although the narrator has stated that Delilah has been lying in wait, we are not told whether or not they actually come out and reveal themselves. Still, her words to Samson indicate clearly that the Philistines are present; there is no deceit at all. The narrator states, after Samson breaks his bonds, 'so the secret of his strength was not known'. This statement confounds an attempt to discern a point of view. Its passive construction, with no subject, does not point to either Samson or Delilah as focalized object. Thus far in the story, then, there is nothing that supports a reading focalized through Samson. That is, the focalizer is an agent located outside the fabula (hereafter abbreviated EF). The EF appears 'objective' because she or he seems mostly to be presenting events and dialogue between characters. This story is, like many stories in the Bible, composed of events and interactions, not of feelings and inner psychological drama. The reader must infer a great deal if she wishes to fill out the characters into complex, feeling, motivated human beings, and two elements that influence the reader's inferences are the actual fabula (the chains of events, regardless of how they are manipulated) and each character's status as focalized object.

The EF in 16.4-9 does not choose one character through which to focalize. The careful reader is not certain which character should receive her sympathy. Later on in the story the narrator will make statements that may suggest a focalization, but at the beginning a reader arguing a character focalization would have to appeal to elements outside the story, for example, that Samson was the main character in the previous stories, or that Samson has been previously characterized as crafty and intelligent.

As the reader reads the first few verses, she is constructing possible meanings which she will keep or discard as the story unfolds and new facts emerge. One possibility is that Delilah is being paid to discover the secret of Samson's strength and, in fact, his life. Logic demands

that, for treachery to occur, she must trick Samson into trusting her and fool him into giving her this information. This is precisely what does not happen. Instead, Samson is depicted as being completely informed and aware of what is going on. Delilah poses the question in somewhat abstract terms ('that one could subdue you') while Samson replies with 'if they bind me', which suggests that he is not ignorant of the plot.

The next episode, 4.10-12, begins with Delilah's words to Samson: 'Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies'. This statement works to focalize the events through Delilah. 'Mock' and 'lie' are strong focalizing verbs because they depend on a point of view, a 'side' with which the reader allies herself in sympathy. It is not plausible that these words are an example of narrative irony, in which the character says one thing to the other character and the reader perceives another meaning, simply because Samson has in fact lied.

One change is that the Philistines do not provide the ropes as they did the bowstrings; the men are still 'lying in wait in an inner chamber', but this second time Delilah's connection with this is not stated. These two slight deviances may indicate a weakening of Delilah's alliance with the Philistines, or perhaps an increase in her status as actor, that is, no longer being a mere intermediary.

The next episode appears to continue this trend. Delilah accuses him again of mocking her and lying to her 'until now', which implies that this, the third time, he will tell the truth. His response to her deviates from his previous responses in a significant way: he says 'if you weave the seven locks of my head. . .'; before he has said 'if they bind me. . .'. In all other respects his words follow the formula, so this alteration is emphasized all the more. In this episode there is not mention of the Philistines, aside from Delilah's formulaic 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson'. Again, this difference seems significant, and focuses the reader on Delilah more as autonomous actor.

One other change is the explicit mention of Samson sleeping while Delilah wove his hair, then awakening. It raises the question of how she accomplished the binding in the previous two episodes if not with his conscious complicity. One possible explanation is that it was a game to him; he was humoring her, aware that none of these things would successfully immobilize him.

The fourth and last episode is the most perplexing for those who

would like to take Samson's side, and yet commentators have used these verses to support virulent ideas about women's control of men. Verse 16, 'And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death', is perhaps one of the few narrative comments in this story that can be identified as focalized through Samson. The reader may sympathize with Samson based on the insight into his feelings and motivation. This sort of emotional description is rare enough that it draws the reader in and encourages identification with the character. But this too is ambiguous because the reader knows, as Samson should know, what will happen if he tells Delilah the secret of this strength, and the emotion of feeling 'vexed' seems hardly to justify his revealing information which has life or death significance.⁷

In other respects, this episode is much like the others, except that it culminates in Samson's capture. Verses 18-20 are remarkable in the extent to which Delilah is the subject and actors, although she is the subject of most of the action verbs in the rest of the story as well. The verbs follow one another in a rapid staccato tempo: she saw, sent, called for, saying, made him sleep, called a man, had him shave, began to torment, said—all these in the space of a few lines. Delilah is as much in control of events as she is of Samson, who sleeps on her knees in a clear position of subordination.

The second time in this entire story in which Samson is the object of focalization comes at the end of this part of the story, in which the narrator states 'And he did not know that the Lord had left him'.⁸ The focalization is complex; the EF does not choose one character as the object of focalization. It is entirely possible to read through this story and, without transgressing the rules of narrative logic, read it as expressing the perspective of Delilah. To regard it as definitively focalized through Samson as a story of his betrayal, however, requires a suspension of one's knowledge of the logic of the events around treachery. The text is, I believe, too thoroughly ambiguous to support such a reading.

I would like to suggest that the story is at least as much about Samson's pride and pretensions to immortality as it is about Delilah's harm to him. One problem with the application of the concept of betrayal to Judges 16 is that it emphasizes Delilah's role in Samson's capture by the Philistines, at the expense of any acknowledgement of his own responsibility for the outcome. Quite simply, a reading that finds 'betrayal' or 'deceit' in Delilah's actions

is unconvincing because Samson is depicted as knowing what is going on and is thus an active participant in the events, not merely a victim.

The dramatic tension in the story comes from the reader's uncertainty of whether Samson will act shrewdly and wisely, or pridefully and brashly; in other words, given the fact that he is aware of Delilah's intentions, will he tempt fate (or rather, tempt God's protection) by revealing the secret of his strength?⁹ The excitement of a narrative containing a true betrayal, by contrast, is of an entirely different nature. In such a story the tension lies in the reader seeing certain events fatefully approach an unknowing character; the drama lies in the uncertainty of whether and how the necessary deceit and trickery will successfully result in the act of betrayal.

These two types of dramatic tension are quite different. Applying the latter to the series of events in Judges forces the reader to ignore certain aspects of the story—such as Samson's share in responsibility—in order to fit it into the framework of betrayal. The element of uncertainty and tension in Judges, in fact, is not so much located around Delilah's ability to successfully deceive, but rather in the lengths to which Samson's pride and impetuosity will drive him.

The story of Judith, by contrast, is impelled by the dramatic tension of a true betrayal. Unlike the Delilah story, it is quite transparent in its ascription of villain and heroine roles. The entire narrative structure and all of its elements work together to set up and reinforce the ending, which is hinted at early in the story. Furthermore, one of the important oppositions in this story is between the people of Israel and the foreigners who threaten to destroy them, and so we as readers of the Jewish story expect an ending that is successful for the people of Israel. The sense of knowledge of the ending has, of course, a powerful influence on the way in which readers interpret events and characters.

The author is thus able to use narrative devices such as irony often and skillfully. When Judith says in 11.6 'And if you follow out the words of your maidservant, God will accomplish something through you, and my lord will not fail to achieve his purpose', the reader, sure that Judith is the heroine on the side of God, and that Holofernes is the villain, picks up the double meaning of 'my lord'—Holofernes thinks it means him, while we, along with Judith, know she means the Lord our God working to destroy Holofernes.

There are many other instances in which Judith uses verbal irony, some hingeing on the ambiguous referent of 'my lord' ('in order that my lord may not be defeated and his purpose frustrated'—11.11; 'I will tell nothing false to my lord this night'—11.5), some not ('God has sent me to accomplish with you things that will astonish the whole world'—11.16; 'I will drink now, my lord, because my life means more to me today than in all the days since I was born'—12.18). These ironies work, and indeed are only identifiable as irony, because a strong focalization has been established. The ironies serve to further strengthen the reader's sympathy with Judith as each instance of verbal irony draws the reader more into collusion with her and her cause.

Besides her skillful use of irony, Judith also lies in order to carry out her plan. Judith's use of deceit is conspicuously absent from many commentaries. Those who do mention it immediately dismiss it, saying that it is irrelevant, that it is not an issue given the context; some of these denials are surprisingly vehement.¹⁰ The assumption that contemporary readers will not be influenced by the message that women use deceit to harm men is indefensible. The Bible (and to a somewhat lesser extent, the Apocrypha) carry a moral weight; the stories are exempla and paradigms. If one takes seriously how narrative and focalization work to make readers identify with characters and actions, one cannot gloss over this integral element of the story as irrelevant.

The Politics of Focalization

This story is very much one coherent entity, and all of its aspects tightly support the focalization. Although Judith does not enter the story until quite late, the conflict has already been established: Holofernes, the general of the Assyrian army, has been shown to be ungodly, dishonorable and unjust. The long account of his atrocities, and Nebuchadnezzar's desire to be worshipped as a god, stand in marked contrast to the God-fearing people of Israel, and especially to Judith. The name 'Judith' suggests a symbolic identity with the Jews, although scholars have contested this connection. She is explicitly described as beyond reproach in her piety. She is respected, wise, beautiful, a chaste widow—all these things are the necessary attributes of a heroine and serve to identify her beyond doubt to the reader as the heroine.

In contrast, we are told almost nothing about Delilah. Far from being neutral, this lack of information contributes to the ambiguity of her character. From a patriarchal point of view, her lack of connection to a male (as 'daughter of', 'widow of', etc.) makes her immediately suspect. Nor are we told anything about her piety, which is a standard way of signalling the attitude the reader is supposed to have toward a character. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Delilah is not chaste. This is a significant factor in male interpretations, and one sees this attitude in interpretations of Judith as well. The story itself emphasizes the latter's chastity both before and after the incident with Holofernes (see 13.16). Commentators, as well, find it necessary to point out that while Judith uses 'a woman's weapons' (*Jerome Biblical Commentary* 1968: 627), that is, her body and sexuality, to perform her heroic deed, she still is able to remain chaste, and it is precisely this latter point that allows her to be the heroine of the story. This double standard—that she must be beautiful and sexual and yet chaste and untouched—reflects profound male ambivalence toward women's sexuality: that it is simultaneously desirable and dangerous.

And yet these sexual politics are subsumed in traditional commentaries under national/military politics. They understand the central and primary conflict to be nationalistic: that of a Jewish hero conquering a powerful enemy. Within this understanding, the male/female conflict is at best secondary, and is usually seen as circumstantial. The fact that a woman seduces then kills a man is merely the way in which this particular victory is accomplished.

Rather than trying to simply replace one opposition in this hierarchy of oppositions with another (that is, man/woman for enemy/Israel), I would like to question the concept of hierarchy which names one opposition central and the rest subordinate. Stories are capable of carrying meanings on many different levels, and one of the messages in this story, along with the traditionally discerned ones concerning the ultimate triumph of faith and piety, and the providence of God, has to do with gender and sexuality. The manipulation of men through sexual enticement is quite explicitly a key element in Judith's scheme: she 'made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all men who might see her' (10.4). The effect is that the Assyrians are described as being fooled as much by her beauty as by her words, and that the two—beauty and deceit—go together. Judith, in her triumphant return to Bethulia states that 'it was my

face that tricked him to his destruction' (13.16). The message could not be more clear: woman's beauty and sexuality are dangerous to men because women use their attractiveness to deceive, harm and kill men.

Judith is often compared with Jael, and sometimes with Deborah and the wise woman of Abel Beth-macah in 2 Samuel, more often than with Delilah. This alone shows the extent to which readings are based on the politics of nationality, not on sexual politics. At the level of fabula, Judith, Jael and Delilah are much the same. They contain the same ideological representation of women, yet they have been interpreted and treated in radically different ways. This difference is due to the different structures of focalization which shapes the reader's response and expectation of one type of dramatic tension rather than another.

Awareness of a story as a particular manifestation of a fabula can reveal connections between two stories, such as Delilah and Judith. The most important realization that this can lead one to is that it is not only the 'negatively' interpreted stories that carry anti-woman ideologies; the 'positive' ones like Judith do as well. That women's sexuality is dangerous to men is a powerful message in both stories; it is more sublimated and domesticated in Judith, because she kills with the approval of the men in her community, but it is nonetheless there.

The reader who recognizes the powerful effect of biblical narratives on our understanding of gender roles and human relations patterns, and, more importantly, on the way these are embodied in our personal lives, institutions and social structures, must ask these questions of sexual politics, both of the text and of its interpreters. By this I mean critically examining the representation of gender, the paradigmatic quality of textual opposition, and the intricate relationship between stories, interpretations and the politics of sexuality today, for all women and men. By refusing to rest in traditional categories of analysis, we can perhaps work toward a clearer vision of the ways in which biblical texts can be truly liberating, and a more critical understanding of precisely where they cannot.

Notes

1. And furthermore, certain stories within the Bible and the interpretation

of these stories are more influential than others. Delilah is a particularly important character in this regard: 'Samson's betrayal by Delilah has become one of the most familiar tales in the Bible' (Comay 1971: 103). While one could not argue with her contention of its familiarity, I will suggest that the notion of betrayal, while as familiar as the story itself, is contestable as an interpretation.

2. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1984: 132) points out the other side of the issue; that is, the power of the text, especially a biblical text, to 'reshape the questions, concepts, values and horizon of the interpreter'. She goes on to question whether, given the androcentric nature of some biblical texts, the appropriate attitude is always one of 'surrender and fidelity' (133) to the text, as hermeneutic theory would emphasize.

3. I am indebted throughout this analysis to Hans George Gadamer's account of the complex relationship between interpretation, tradition and a 'classic' text, of which the Bible is certainly one. For a discussion of the particular difficulties associated with *Wirkungsgeschichte*, or effective-history of a text, see *Truth and Method* (1984: 267 and following).

4. Cf. the chapter entitled 'Characterization and the Art of Reticence' in Robert Alter, 1981.

5. The matter of betrayal is so widely assumed that it is merely stated as a matter of fact: 'She then betrayed him to the Philistines, so that they were able to seize and imprison him' (Buttrick, vol. I: 814). Delilah is defined as 'the Philistine woman who betrayed Samson' (Comay 1971: 103). One commentary, in order to safeguard the idea of betrayal, makes the illogical claim that Delilah's shout in 16.9 ('The Philistines are upon you, Samson!'), which is repeated three more times, merely 'tests Samson's explanation of the secret of his strength without revealing her treachery or the presence of the Philistine ambush' (Black 1962: 313).

6. Among them, see J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges, A Commentary*, 1981: 237. See also the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1968: 160.

7. And yet even Samson's action of revealing his secret is read by commentators as Delilah's action through her betrayal and victimization of Samson: Delilah 'readily recognized that her nagging had at last succeeded when he lay bare the essence of his being' (Buttrick, vol. IV: 199). This emphasis on Delilah as actor, which removes responsibility from Samson, is necessary in order for the interpretation of the story as a drama of betrayal to make sense.

8. The first line of the story, 'After this he loved a woman' (16.4) is arguably a third focalization point, but it also functions as a statement of fact and location, that is, that he was sleeping with a woman in the valley of Sorek.

9. A few commentators link Samson's downfall with his repeated transgressions of his Nazirite vows; see, for example Buttrick 1962, vol. IV: 200, and Black 1962: 313.

10. See R.H. Charles (1913: 247): 'the objection which has been made to Judith's deceit and approval of violence scarcely deserves notice. It could only be made in complete ignorance of the time'. And also the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1968: 627. 'The use of artifice as a tactic of warfare was held in highest regard in those ancient times. It would be naive to be scandalized by such conduct.' Both of these remarks assume a morally superior stance, and in their condescension, avoid having to grapple with what is an undeniably important element in the plot: Judith's deceit. Buttrick (vol. II), while acknowledging the ethical problem of the means Judith uses to pursue her end, nevertheless states that 'the story has to be understood against the background of the time which it describes—a period of history in which the Jewish nation depended for its survival upon the resourcefulness and even ruthlessness of individuals' (1024). May (1977: 87n) acknowledges that 'the moral question is complex and the practical solution sometimes agonizing', but this sensitive treatment is atypical among commentaries.

DEBORAH THE WOMAN WARRIOR

Rachel C. Rasmussen

Deborah, the judge, prophetess, and warrior is a rare and remarkable character in the Old Testament. Her story in Judges 4 and 5 is unique in its double presentation in poetry and prose. Her oracle is cryptic in its plot to defeat the enemy by a woman's hand, her song unusual in its expressions of the power of motherhood and its striking recognition of the woman, Jael.

However, this reception of the story of Deborah is not shared by most scholarly readings and interpretations of the text. Deborah is more often encountered as a problem. In commentaries, her status as the main character in the narrative is unclear, and the authenticity of her office is questioned. Instead, commentators focus on the battle as the real subject of the narrative.

This traditional reception of Deborah is understandable in part, for, as we hope to show, Deborah's presentation in the narrative is problematic. Ultimately, however, such readings must be re-evaluated, since they arise from presumptions about the roles of women, rather than from the text. A more thorough examination of the narrative reveals that it is the sudden *disappearance* of Deborah in 4.14b-15 that presents the real problem. The solution this paper proposes is the existence of an earlier story in which Deborah herself is the main warrior. Most likely this story would have circulated in a women's oral tradition, functioning in cults of the goddesses Asherah and Anath for the commemoration and empowerment of women in a male-dominated culture. Deborah's disappearance in the redacted text will be explained as the result of editors and redactors, who were not sympathetic toward polytheistic religion.

This proposal depends on a narratological analysis of Judges 4, which is presented here as a more fruitful starting place for an

exploration of the significance of the women characters in the story. The fruitfulness of this method will be made clear by a comparison with other methods of reading. Therefore, the paper begins with a brief presentation of standard interpretations of women characters in the Old Testament, focusing mainly on Deborah and Jael. The focus will be on what these interpreters perceive as the problem in the story line. Analysis of these interpretations will then reveal their neglect of the narrative aspects of the text, as well as their ideological biases. The narrative theory of Mieke Bal will be used to locate the real problem within the story, i.e., the absence of the main character.¹ Finally, evidence for my proposed solution to this problem—that an earlier version of the story was told within the context of women's cults – will be drawn from the biblical text and read in the light of I.M. Lewis's sociological theory of the function of women's cults in male dominated societies. An interaction between the biblical data and the anthropological data will provide plausibility for my hypothesis.

Previous interpretations of the significance of Deborah and Jael suffer from an unscholarly inattentiveness to these characters' subjectivity as narrated in the text. Two factors may be said to contribute to a negligence of the narration in which these characters exist. The first is that the process of reading a story involves constant, largely unconscious, interpretive activity. The reader's sense of what is possible, logical, and coherent interacts with the narrative's logic, to produce either understanding or problems, which then require more conscious interpretive efforts. The second factor, building on the first, is that the main characters in the story are women. Lacking information about the lives of women in the twelfth to tenth centuries BCE, commentators speculate on the significance of the role of these women in the story, as well as in the larger history of Israel. The need to speculate arises from what appears to be a problem in the story line for the commentators. The problem most frequently encountered in reading about Deborah is, not surprisingly, how a woman could be a judge, prophet, and warrior in a patriarchal culture. Hence, traditional interpretations present explanations of this phenomenon, so that the portrayal of the character and events in the narrative fit with the ideology of the reader. This ideological reception commits an error common in theorizing about women's roles in history, in that it assumes that women at that time had no

consciousness of their oppression, and no subjective interpretation of it by which they made sense of their experience. This assumption, both ethnocentric and gender biased, limits the questions asked of the text. A few examples of ideological reading are presented to demonstrate how this assumption operates to the detriment of scholarship on these texts.

One interpretation of the significance of the characters Deborah and Jael is to say that their roles are indicative of the fact that the early Israelite attitude toward women, while patriarchal, was not impossible to challenge. Barnabas Lindars, who is attentive to what he calls a 'feminist theme' underlying the narrative in ch. 4, recognizes that Deborah must have broken through conventional barriers to be a judge. However, he seems to give credit to the redactor and warns those who might seek a history of women's theological interpretation in the text:

The part played by the women in these superb compositions should not be over-emphasized. Inevitably the more extreme proponents of feminist theology today are likely to seize on Deborah and Jael in order to fight their own battles. However, it does seem clear that the Deuteronomic editor has brought Deborah into line with the ruler-judges who form the basis of his chronological scheme. . . As he has apparently done this without a qualm, we must assume that the idea that a woman should hold such a position (at least in those days when things were different!) was not an anathema to him (Lindars: 172-73).

Some theological interpretations share the same tendency when they interpret the activity of Deborah and Jael as Yahweh's activity. In this reading, Yahweh's choice to work wonders through women says more about Yahweh than about the women. Further, the wonder he works through these women is action against the cults of the goddesses, Asherah and Anath (Demster 1978: 44, Taylor 1982: 104, Craigie 1978: 380). Demster sums up this view: 'On this day Anath is impotent, the real feminine warrior fights on Israel's behalf, Yahweh's servant Deborah' (Demster: 50-51). In this reading, then, Deborah has no subjective significance. Rather Yahweh is the main character of the story.

The approach and method of literary criticism does not *ipso facto* avoid these pitfalls in interpretation either. Perhaps they are the best examples of the ideological method we are exposing. Critical of the biblical scholars' use of literary criticism to read the text in order to

find its seams and dissect it, teachers of literature choose instead to read for the unifying principle of the narrative (Ryken 1974: 27). Since the unifying principle of the text has been provided by the Deuteronomic framework, prevalent throughout the book of Judges, such an interpretation will remain at the level of the final redaction. The women characters are read as symbols of Hebrew national experience, i.e., women's plight as second-class members of society is like Israel's plight in the land of Egypt or Canaan. While interpreting the significance of the women characters in Exodus 1-2, James Ackerman's words are examples of this reading, for he interprets the role of women as being 'symbolic of that which is least and weakest in ancient culture (as were the Hebrew themselves)' (Ackerman 1974: 95). This is to ignore the fact that the Hebrews, whom the women represented, were the ones who kept them 'least and weakest'. He does not ask whether the women would have characterized themselves as representative of a patriarchal society.

Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis makes clear that his interpretation is based on presumption when, in his exegesis of 5.3 he explains: 'The emphasis on 'I' draws attention to the fact that the judge and deliverer of Israel is a woman, a weak person, presumably, but one who turns out to be the people's strength' (Louis 1974: 149-50). In fact, there is no evidence in either ch. 4 or 5 that would allow him to characterize Deborah as a weak person. Louis is not, in effect, reading her 'I' at all, but his own view of women. This reading of female characters as symbols is most haphazard, because it simply ignores the literary evidence of the subjectivity of these characters.

A detailed example from the commentary by Alberto Soggin will make clear our point that ideological reading does not directly confront the problem it tries to explain, i.e., the phenomenon of the unusual women, Deborah and Jael.² In commenting on the character and role of Deborah, Soggin chooses between the chapters to read with 4, that Deborah did not, in fact, go to battle with Barak. His choice to read the presentation of Deborah in ch. 4 over the presentation in ch. 5 is justified, it would seem, by the theory that these were originally two separate accounts. Soggin seems to read 4 as the more historical. His presumptions cause him to read the disappearance of Deborah as a natural and expected fact. It is no problem that a woman does not go to battle. It is the normal pattern in a holy war that Yahweh should fight for his people. Soggin seems to understand the narration's silence about Deborah to be fitting

with her character, which he has stereotyped as faithful to the point of irresponsible and impractical. He proposes that Barak was the original judge in the story since in the end it is he, and not Deborah who leads the troops to battle. In Soggin's reading, then, Deborah loses her status as judge because of her absence at the time of the battle.

These examples are presented not to discredit any scholars. Indeed, this paper will draw heavily on the scholarship of Soggin and others. Rather, they are offered to make the point that inattentiveness to the narrative itself, and unawareness of one's own subjective interaction with the story, result in ideological speculations that do not ultimately move scholarship forward toward proposing acceptable interpretations of the significance of Deborah and Jael.

Since Deborah and Jael are characters, and as such, can be known only through the narration which gives them being, my interpretation begins with the narrative. My plan is to present a narratological description of the characters (technically the actors) in the belief that such a description will allow the alleged problems to be located in the narration, and then to be assessed as problems. Let us turn now to that task.

A word about how I perceive and will read the relation of ch. 4 to ch. 5 is required at the beginning of this section. It is commonly accepted by biblical scholars that the poetry of ch. 5 is some of the earliest literature we have in the Bible. It is thought to date from around the twelfth century BCE (Demster: 43, Globe 1974: 497). The final redaction of the prose and the poetry has been proposed to have occurred in the seventh to sixth centuries (Kraft 1962: 1019). While I recognize the redactor's arrangement in which the storyline of ch. 4 includes the singing of the Song, I am not reading them in that relation. Even so, it is not necessary to read them as two separate texts, either choosing the more original one, or reconciling them to each other. I make sense of them as two related accounts; related in that they have the same characters. The events are similar, but not the same. The narratological analysis will pertain to ch. 4 as it is the narrative. I will not include the Deuteronomic framework in this analysis, since it is not a part of the narrative proper. Chapter 5 will be consulted for its characterization of Deborah and Jael as well.

The question of Deborah's characterization as an actor is raised when the events of the story are traced. Setting the framework aside,

since it is not part of the narrative proper, the story begins with a description of Deborah that is itself key. The Hebrew stresses her sex, saying literally, 'Now Deborah, *woman* prophetess *woman* of Lappidoth was judging Israel at that time' (4.4, translation and emphasis mine). Whoever Lappidoth is, if the word is to be taken as a proper noun at all,³ he is never heard of again in the narrative or the song. The prophetess gives an oracle summoning the leader of the Israelite army to battle the enemy Sisera. Barak says that he will not go to battle unless accompanied by Deborah. She assures him that she will go and then gives the second part of the oracle; that Yahweh will give Sisera into the hand of a woman. Then the two of them mobilize the troops and go to the place according to the battle plans. Next we are informed of a move by the Kenite tribe, as well as Sisera's response to the news of mobilization. Then Deborah sounds the battle cry, and promptly disappears from the narrative. Meanwhile Barak goes off to fight and Yahweh routs the enemy before his sword. Next follows the episode in which Jael calls the fleeing Sisera into her tent and kills him. Barak catches up in the end to see what she has done.

The problem in the story, from a narratological perspective, is the disappearance of Deborah. While it is not a rule that the main character should remain in the story, her disappearance in this case is striking. Did she go to battle with Barak? Or are we to understand that she stayed behind in the camp composing a song?

What follows is a mapping of the story in terms of the relations between the subjects' aims and their objects (Bal 1985: 26-31). This will enable us to see more clearly what is happening in the narration of Deborah in ch. 4. The first chart outlines the actors and their objectives, the second outlines the power of the actors, which either helps or prevents them in the attainment of their objectives.

CHART 1

<i>Actor</i>	<i>Aims</i>	<i>Object</i>
Deborah	to summon	battle
Yahweh	to give Sisera	into the hand of a woman
Barak	to defeat	Sisera
Sisera	to defeat	Barak
Jael	to kill	Sisera

CHART 2

<i>Actor</i>	<i>Power + or -</i>	<i>Objective</i>
Deborah	Yahweh +	in summoning battle
Yahweh	Deborah, Jael +	in fulfilling oracle
Barak	Yahweh -	in defeating Sisera
Sisera	Jael -	in defeating Barak
Jael	Yahweh (?) +	in killing Sisera

These charts may be summarized thus: The characters who are successful in their aims are the women and Yahweh. The women and Yahweh have a reciprocal relationship in which he is their power and they are his. Yahweh's program is at cross-purposes with Barak to some extent, and certainly with Sisera. We also notice a curious exchange of interest or similarity between Deborah's and Yahweh's aims. While she summons the holy war, which one might think would be in his interest, he decides to give the enemy into a woman's hand, which one might think to be in her interest. The oracle of v. 7 offers the crucial clue. For aside from the mention of Yahweh in the framework (vv. 1-3), this is the first time in the narrative proper that Yahweh is introduced. Yahweh's character is known in the voice of Deborah, embedded in this speech act, which sets the events of the fabula in motion.⁴ The merging of their aims in the fabula is not due to Deborah's great faith, since there is no mention of her faith here. But rather, the ambiguity of the 'I' in the oracle reveals their relationship. The question is, who is the 'I' that will draw out Sisera? Who is it that will give Sisera into the hand of a woman? Soggin's explanation of the workings of Hebrew direct speech (Soggin 1981: 65) does not disqualify the possibility of reading the 'I' as Deborah herself. There is a strong correlation between Deborah's presence and the deity's presence, Deborah's speech and the deity's speech. They are one in the narrative up until the point of the battle, at which time Yahweh's first occurrence in the narrative outside of Deborah's speech—his entrance as a warrior—coincides with Deborah's sudden disappearance. Read together with ch. 5's depiction of Deborah as a warrior, we must ask about the meaning of the elimination of Deborah's warfare.

This, then, is the real problem buried underneath the pseudo-problem of how a woman could be a judge, prophet, and warrior. This problem arises from the text. The other arises from disbelief of the text. It is an argument from the silence of the narration as opposed to arguments against the content of narration. Further, the

pseudo-problem puts the burden of proof in the wrong place. Instead of presenting data to show the possibility of women being competent leaders, research should be directed at the disappearance of Deborah. Having shown that Deborah is the main character, an explanation is required for the elimination of her role in the battle. I propose that her role as warrior is subtly supplanted by Yahweh the divine warrior. What, then, did Yahweh, or rather his proponents have against a woman warrior? The trouble with Deborah the woman warrior, for the transmitters of the story, may have been what lies behind her story: the theme of the Canaanite divine warrior goddess, Anath. A discussion of whether the transformation of this earlier story involved a patriarchal program along with its theological program must wait until the end of this paper.

It has been argued by Frank Cross and others, that the themes and language from the Baal-Anath mythic cycle of Canaanite tradition inform Israel's religious expression about its tribal god, Yahweh.⁵ Yahweh is depicted in the image of Baal, the divine warrior, and of El, the father of the gods. However, the divine warrior image is not exclusively masculine in the Canaanite tradition, as the poetry about Anath confirms. Craigie and Taylor have already suggested that the imagery of Anath and Ashtart lies behind the depiction of Deborah and Jael in ch. 5. However, their interpretations of this goddess imagery deal only with what might have been the redactor's use of the myth, which was to characterize Deborah and Jael like the goddesses in order to mock the Canaanite religion.

the power attributed by the Canaanites to their violent goddess was as nothing; poetically speaking, similar power could be seen in a human Hebrew woman, though that strength was not her own but was rooted in her commitment to Yahweh (Craigie: 380).

This interpretation of the meaning of the mythic imagery in the redaction is a valid and compelling one. However, my interest is to interpret the goddess imagery for the other story I am proposing; the story in which Deborah is the main warrior.

With Soggin, I distinguish two layers in ch. 5 (Soggin: 94-95). Verses 6-8, 12, and 14-30 make up what may be described as a heroic song, while vv. 2-5, 9, 11, 13, and 31 make up the hymn to Yahweh. The former tells of the situation before the battle, and celebrates the human participants in the battle. Yahweh is not mentioned by name in these verses. The only non-human warriors are the stars and the

torrent, Kishon. Craigie and Demster point to references in Ugaritic mythology in which Anath is associated with the stars and the rain, which was believed to come from the stars (Craigie: 380). Combined with the hymn to Yahweh, however, the song tells of a holy war in which Yahweh is the reason for Israel's victory. The stars and rain are now assumed to be Yahweh's domain.

[The references to Yahweh]... presuppose a theological systematization which suggests a later stage of transmission, when the ancient epic was inserted into a theological and cultic context intended to provide an interpretive key: the hymn is no longer about the 'mighty men of Israel' or their commanders, but the 'glorious deeds of the Lord' in leading Israel (v. 11a) (Soggin: 95).

My hypothesis is that before the conflation of the two, the theme and imagery of the divine warrior Anath was the model for Deborah's portrayal as a warrior. In this story, it would have been Deborah who routed Sisera's troop before Barak's sword, and who desired to deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman. If Deborah was being portrayed in *imitatio deae*, the goddess imagery would have been employed positively for—not against—the empowerment of women through the recognition of the goddess, as elsewhere in the Old Testament the mythic imagery of Baal and El was employed to positively characterize and empower Yahweh. Due to its subversive potential in the view of the monotheistic proponents of later centuries, it then would have been transformed to reflect the theology and ideology of the dominant group. This idea thus solves the problem that the narratological approach revealed. However, it requires a different context for this story than has heretofore been entertained for this story. It is possible that the story of Deborah the woman warrior circulated during the era of the Judges in a women's oral tradition, in cults which were polytheistic in nature. Reasons for this suggestion come from the history of Israelite religion, as well as references in the text.

One objection to the proposal that there was an earlier story inspired by the story of Anath is the antagonism between the Canaanite religion and Israelite religion in much of the biblical records. However, much research has been done which suggests that Israel's past was polytheistic. Archaeological finds of goddess figurines coupled with the constant antagonism between Yahweh worship and

the worship of other deities has caused many to conclude that polytheism was not unknown in early Israel.

During the four and a half centuries of Israelite monarchy (ca. 1020-586 BC), the dominant religion is polytheistic and undifferentiated from that of its neighbors. The religions of the Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Tyrians, etc., are local variants of the common Syro-Palestinian pattern which is not transcended by their individual traits and distinctive features. The original religion of Israel belongs to this group of West-Semitic cults (Lang 1983: 23).

But even if Yahweh was worshipped among the gods and goddesses, why would he not have been a part of this early story I am proposing? It is a warrior story and he is a god of war. Sociologist Carol Meyers provides a possible answer when she cites the connection between a higher status and better treatment of women within those cultures which worship goddesses.

In many of the social contexts that ethnographers have investigated as they have sought to comprehend labor balance and relative gender status, a relationship can be shown to exist between female roles and female goddesses. That is, there is a high correlation between the number of deities who are female in a given society and the female contributions to the essential tasks of society. The theoretical explanation of this correlation suggests that the belief system is a reflection and legitimization of vital female contributions to subsistence or production activities (Meyers 1983: 587).

This, then, may serve as the motive for why Israelite women would tell a story inspired by the myth of Anath. This motive recognizes the likelihood of women's consciousness of their inferior status, as well as of their own attempts to interpret their experience.

An interaction with the work of I.M. Lewis regarding spirit-possession cults will enable us to read the biblical data in this light. In his sociological analysis of the function and contexts of spirit-possession cults in traditional societies, Lewis presents two patterns of cults that are relevant to this idea.⁷ First are the peripheral cults. Their characteristics are: high female membership. The male members of such cults are few, and of low social status, indicating that it is the social status of women that is the key, and not anything inherent in the female sex. The spirits in questions are amoral, i.e., they are not a part of the main morality of the society. In addition,

they are 'believed to originate *outside* the societies whose women they plague. Frequently they are the spirits of hostile neighbouring peoples, so that animosities between rival local communities become reflected in this mystical idiom' (Lewis 1971: 32). These cults function in Lewis' view, as a protest against the dominant group. This again is an indication that, in fact, women and other marginalized people do not always go along with the main religious interpretations which sanction male dominance, but have perceived their oppression.

such women's possession cults are also, I argue, thinly disguised protest movements directed against the dominant sex. They thus play a significant part in the sex-war in traditional societies and cultures where women lack more obvious and direct means for forwarding their aims (Lewis: 31).

The way these cults work is that the person afflicted by a spirit requires some kind of cure. The remedy is usually given by a shaman, who knows how to appease the spirits so that they will leave the person alone. As Lewis explains, 'This treatment is usually accomplished by the induction of the affected women into a female cult group which regularly promotes possession experiences among its members. Within the secluded cult group, possession has thus lost its malign significance' (Lewis: 30). One rite of the cult that enables recovery is a ritual form of role reversal in which the cult members act out the power that others have. Lewis also makes the point that this cult pattern does not directly challenge the existing system, but has its power through its ability to manipulate the existing system, thereby offering a way for its members, who do not benefit from the main system of the given society, to live with it.

The second pattern is the central possession cult. In this case, spirit-possession cults are the central religion of the culture. In this pattern, the more socially dominant are included in the role of shaman as well. This is rare, since enthusiasm is most prevalent at the beginning of a religious movement and soon contained through institutionalization. The important point for us is the way these cults resist being institutionalized. Lewis explains:

The political and legal authority wielded by the holders of these religious commissions is, as we shall see, largely a function of the availability of other more specialized agencies of political and social control. In highly atomized societies without secure and clearly defined political positions, the shaman comes into his own

as an omni-competent leader, regulating intercourse both between man and man and between men and the spirits (Lewis: 34).

Finally, the boundaries between the peripheral cults and the central cults are, 'ill-defined and shifting, and it is often difficult to assess with confidence the precise placement of a particular instance in its temporal and social setting' (Lewis: 128).

The point at which Lewis' theory and the context for the story of Deborah interact is the religious use of oral narrative tradition. Performance of songs and the recitation of stories has always played a part in the cultic rites of any religion. In Albert Lord's words, 'The roots of oral traditional narrative are not artistic but religious in the broadest sense' (Lord 1960: 67). The earlier story of Deborah, then, may have been told as part of the rites of women's cult. Within a cult of the first sort, women may have told the story about Deborah, who seems to resemble, as we shall see, a shaman in the more central cult pattern. Indeed, the rest of the judges fit this second pattern in which political and spiritual leadership is authenticated by the possession of the spirit of Yahweh.

There are many elements in the text to suggest that an earlier story may have been told as a rite within women's cults. The important distinction to note here, however, is that the following elements from within the narrative are not offered to suggest the historicity of a person named Deborah, but rather to suggest that women's cults may have been the reality reflected in the earlier story.

From the text, then, Deborah is described as sitting, or having her office, under the 'palm of Deborah'. There is a dispute on the rendering of the word for 'palm' in Hebrew. The vowel pointing is from the word for a pole or post, which is the iconography for the goddess Asherah, the mother of Anath (Soggin: 64). Reading it thus, the divinity authenticating Deborah's oracle could have been Asherah.

The breadth of her office, judge, prophet (or some kind of religious leader), warrior, as we have seen, has been a problem for many commentators. Read in the light of Lewis' central spirit-possession cults, in which unstable economic, social, and environmental conditions enable shamans to be the government, her influence is no longer out of place. Carol Meyers has shown that the required factors of instability were present during this era (Meyers: 1983).

The dialogue between Deborah and Barak, also a problem for

those commentators who are sympathetic to Barak, can be read in our context of a women's cult, as an expression of the element of role reversal. While they do go out together to battle, Barak is clearly of lesser importance.

Jael's role also suggests something of a reversal. Hackett points out that she is mentioned in parallel construction with Shamgar, who also was a soldier (Hackett 1985: 28). She is a tent-dwelling woman who does the soldier's job with the household tools of mallet and tent-peg. Jael's action has received harsh condemnation by commentators for breaking the hospitality laws sacred to nomadic tribes of the entire Near East (Soggin: 77-78, Kraft: 1022). At the risk of belaboring the point, the problem here is not with the text. There is no condemnation of her action, or even the slightest allusion to a hospitality code. In terms of the element of role reversal, it makes more sense to read this as a woman's response to the hospitality code as it was practised in regard to women in the Near East. In light of the stories in Genesis 19 and Judges 19, where in the effort to be hospitable to male guests, male hosts offer the women of their households to rapists, such an interpretation of Jael's 'treachery' is conceivable.

Another element which may suggest the context of women's cults, of course, is the voice of the singer in ch. 5. If women are the singers of the Song, then my proposal about the women cults is more plausible. However, the preferred translation of the verb in 5.7b, by most scholars, is 'you arose' instead of the possible 'I arose'. The arguments remain inconclusive, yet are usually accompanied by the thought that it is most likely not Deborah singing here. Rather the Song 'of' Deborah means the Song about Deborah (Soggin: 86). The reasoning here depends on the fact that the Song pre-dates the narrative, and so the idea that Deborah and Barak sang this song after the battle is a part of the redactor's arrangement. It is interesting to note, however, that reading these chapters separately at this point obscures the subjective voice of the women. For the singer, once anonymous, is assumed to be male. In this traditional reading, Deborah and Jael are related only in their service to Yahweh. They have no relationship without him. In this case, Boling may have a point when he interprets Deborah as having no subjective understanding of her oracle and that she mistook herself for the women in the oracle. 'Deborah is thus represented as speaking better than she knows, an example of unconscious

prediction, which adds to the poignancy of the outcome' (Boling 1975: 96). But if it is read 'I arose' it is the voice of a woman. This voice resonates—or is echoed—in the oracle, which is the decisive speech act in the narrative. Both are uttered by a woman, speaking of other women. In this reading, Boling is wrong. Deborah could have known whereof she spoke. It makes sense that the Song which connects women in religious speech acts is sung within a women's cult. There is no need in this case to explain away 'in the days of Jael' (Soggin: 85, Lindars: 67). Furthermore, 5.12 is not problematic if the Song is sung by women. It is not inconceivable for the perspective of the singer to change, since the commemoration of Deborah is a commemoration of the women singers. The point here is that 'I arose as a mother in Israel' establishes the voice of women, relating not only to Deborah as a mother on the rise, but also as a woman who remembers women.

The issue of the meaning of womanhood and motherhood in the Song may now take on a new political significance, beyond that of the nationalistic interpretation in which Hebrew women are contrasted to Canaanite goddesses. The Song, structured with Deborah, a mother, at the beginning, and Sisera's mother at the end, makes a point about motherhood as it involves loyalty to other women. Deborah's expression of her motherhood in 5.7 is new, having no children that we know of. As a woman, she is free of the usual identifier given in most references to women in the Old Testament, i.e., 'wife of so-and-so'. In contrast, every reference to Barak in the Song includes 'son of Abinoam'; while Deborah's name seems to stand for itself. Depending on how the Hebrew is read, 'Jael, wife of Heber, the Kenite', may also read, 'Jael, a member of the Kenite group' (Soggin: 67).

Sisera's mother, in contrast to Deborah and Jael, is portrayed filling her expectant hours imagining that Sisera is raping and pillaging maidens and their treasures. Craigie points out the irony of expecting women to be Sisera's reward, when in fact, he becomes their reward (Craigie: 379).

A narratological analysis of the text, then, has revealed the elimination of the warrior role of Deborah in ch. 4. Attentive to her role in the Song, as well as the narration of her character in the beginning of ch. 4, I have proposed the existence of an earlier story, in which Deborah herself, and not Yahweh, is the warrior who fights Sisera. Her antecedent in this role is Anath, the divine warrior of

Canaanite religion. Further, I have suggested that the reason Israelite women could sing a song centered on the theme of a foreign goddess was that they were conscious of their status as women in a male-dominated world, and told this story as some sort of ritual within their cults of Asherah and Anath, where conceivably, the roles and contributions of women could have been subjectively named and valued.

In conclusion, it is difficult to resist commenting on the effect of monotheistic Yahwism for the women of this story. The effect of Yahweh's introduction into the story is to obscure the significance, not only of the goddess image for Israelite women, but also the reality of women's subjectivity. When Yahweh is read as the one who deigns to give Sisera into the hand of a woman, the reason for the participation of the women is shrouded in the theological doctrine of the mysterious mind of the deity. The effect of this reading is to render irrelevant the participation of the women in their own story. Thus, the final redaction of Judges 4 and 5 writes women's subjectivity out of the history of Israel, as it transforms this into Yahweh's story. Biblical scholarship and interpretation should not do the same.

Notes

1. In addition to using her theory of narrative, this paper follows the procedure on p. 9: 'Intuitively, on the basis of a careful reading of the text, s/he selects those elements of the theory which s/he thinks particularly relevant to the text that s/he wishes to describe. S/he can then use this partial description of the text to help in making further assumptions about other aspects of the text. These assumptions can then be tested on the basis of other data'.

2. For his treatment of chs. 4 and 5, see pp. 60-101.

3. Freema Gottlieb translates 'Lappidoth' as 'fiery woman' (p. 195), which makes more sense than 'wife of Lappidoth', in the light of Deborah's character, and also the fact that we never hear of Lappidoth again.

4. I have found Miscall helpful on reading Yahweh as a character: '... there is therefore no reason that God and issues revolving around him will have any more clarity and definition than other parts of Old Testament narrative' (p. 37).

5. These ideas are argued in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*.

6. Demster makes much of this antagonistic relationship in his discussion of the meaning of the mythic elements in the redacted story.

7. These cult patterns are discussed in Chapter 1 of Lewis.

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NARRATIVE THEORY, IDEOLOGY, AND TRANSFORMATION IN JUDGES 4

Stephen W. Hanselman

Reading as 'Inferential Walk'

Umberto Eco's proposed semiotics of reading (Eco 1979, 1984) provides an excellent point of departure for one who is interested in approaching the narratives of the Hebrew Bible with the specific intention of generating a new reading in the face of hackneyed, irrelevant, and even oppressive established readings. Eco understands the act of writing as a communicative process in which the writer must imagine a 'Model Reader' in order to convey his or her message in subcodes which may be recognized, and hence effective (1979: 7). According to Eco, an author seeks to convey a univocal message, but cannot do so without imagining a reader in whom this message may be realized. He quickly points out that such authorial intentions rarely ever find fruition in a reader such as is imagined (1979: 8). Indeed, Eco's primary point is that the pragmatics of reading, involved at the very level of textual production, do not admit of the possibility of producing a 'closed', or univocal text. Try as an author might to produce the sort of text that will elicit subservient accord on the part of the reader, the history of every text is 'in the last analysis randomly open to every pragmatic accident' (1979: 7). Hence, every text is more or less indeterminate when considered from the vantage of reading—that is, when viewed in its natural environment, the communicative process.

Eco's insistence on the necessity of variant readings in the communicative process brings to light the productive role of the reader in interpretation. In the process of interpretation, the reader is summoned to identify the elementary ideologemes of the text: this

identification can only be accomplished with reference to the reader's own ideological subcodes (1979: 22). This self-reference overdetermines the identification of structures, all the way down to the primary level of abstraction from the text—the *fabula*. Even the basic 'stuff' of a story is affected by this process of identification through self-reference. Thus it is that the *fabula* is best thought of not as the content or property of a text, but rather as a function of text/reader interaction which involves ideology at the most basic level. Eco writes:

The *fabula* is not produced once the text has been definitively read: the *fabula* is the result of a continuous series of abductions made during the course of the reading. Therefore the *fabula* is always experienced step by step (1979: 31).

In this essay, I take the conception of *fabula* as an '*inferential walk*' (proposed by Eco) as a point of departure for an evaluation of the narrative account of Judges 4. Such a conception allows for the coexistence of numerous *fabulae*—within a single text both with respect to its narrative isotopies, and with regard to the 'macro-propositions' ascribed to the story as a whole. This 'walk' with the text of Judges 4 must begin with a 'forecast' or identification of the narrative theme. Because such an identification involves the necessary influence of ideological sub-codes which are themselves overdeterminative of the act of reading, I will attempt to identify explicitly the ideological character of the proposed theme so that its value as the basis for an alternative reading of the text may be clarified vis-à-vis other dominant readings.

The following reading will consist of two parts. First, the narrative theme will be identified as a basis for a structural mapping of the actantial functions of the narrative account. This reading will be evaluated vis-à-vis other readings, based on opposing narrative themes. The mapping offered provides a plausible interpretation which places the female actants centrally within the narrative framework and the thematic development. Thus, it involves a transformation of the ideologies normally associated with the text. Traditionally, the story in Judges 4 has been taken to be about the male actants, their power (or its squandering through cowardice), and about the battle which they waged.¹ My reading will assume in its narrative theme, or first step, the opposite view. That such a reading is possible is of great significance to those who, like myself, wish to find in the Hebrew narratives the grounds for a positive

portrayal of women, as characters who act on their own terms. Therefore, my approach assumes the fundamental value of re-reading the predominantly patriarchal Hebrew narratives in order to generate 'new' readings.

The second part of the reading will make use of a sub-text—the Canaanite tale of *Aghat*—in order to illuminate and clarify the nature of the transformation suggested in the first part. The use of a sub-text is in itself an indispensable feature of the way in which reading takes place within a culture. The cultural transmission and reception of stories is a process in which primary and sub-texts interact to enable communication, while effecting mutual transformation. Reading with a sub-text makes possible the systematic delineation of identity and difference in two texts, thereby precluding the misuse of parallels while yet enhancing the difference of each text. The Canaanite tale of *Aghat* represents a generally accepted parallel, recognized by biblical scholarship, which lends support to my proposed narrative theme and analysis of Judges 4. While the arguments advanced in the first analysis stand on their own, they are strengthened by the insights afforded by the sub-text reading.

A Narratological Mapping of Judges 4

A narratological mapping of Judges 4 must begin, as noted above, with an identification of a 'narrative theme' (Eco, 1979).² While perhaps blurring the sometimes useful distinction between 'story' and 'fabula',³ a preliminary admission of the necessity of a narrative theme, together with the semantic pre-commitments it entails, helps to clarify the productive role of the reader in narratological analysis. Furthermore, it precludes confusion which might arise from a problematic and erroneous identification of any element of literary-critical investigation with an alleged *property* of the text. In this way, the dynamic functions of reader/text interaction are left open to critical view, rather than being glossed over by a simplistic conception of meaning as property. As Robert Alter has remarked, meaning was never regarded as a property of narrative texts in the Hebrew tradition:

an essential aim of the innovative technique of fiction worked out by the ancient Hebrew writers was to produce a certain indeterminacy of meaning, especially with regard to motive, moral character, and psychology. . . . Meaning, perhaps for the first time in

narrative literature, was conceived as a *process*, requiring continual revision—both in the ordinary sense and in the etymological sense of seeing-again—continual suspension of judgment, weighing of multiple possibilities, brooding over gaps in the information provided (Alter 1981: 12).

The first step in this process of 're-visioning' is, then, to identify a narrative topic, or theme, as the basis of an 'inferential walk'. I will choose as the theme of this narrative the hypothesis that *it is a celebration of the subversion of patriarchal (literally, father-based) order at the behest and hands of a woman*. This theme suggested itself as a way of accounting for the central position of the female actants, as well as for the relative insignificance of the male actants with regard to the thematic development, and, finally, for the way in which the battle functions more as a backdrop to, rather than an instrument of, the thematic development.

This theme can be used to counter other narrative themes which have supported oppressive fabulae. Most notably, this theme is diametrically opposed to the predominate supposition in the history of biblical exegesis of this text: that this story is about how the God of the Fathers could use *even a woman*,⁴ or would do so *only* if God's men proved to be spineless. Most commentators (e.g. Soggin and Gray, see below) have used this thematic assumption to analyze the dynamics of Deborah and Barak in such a way as to distract the reader from, or efface the significance of, Deborah as an actant. An actantial analysis of Judges 4 on the basis of the proposed narrative theme will not bear out these hackneyed explanations. Rather than portray Judges 4 in terms of male power and actions, this reading takes it as about the power of women and their actions.

One of the basic types of analysis which can be employed profitably with the narratives of the Hebrew Bible is that of structuralism.⁵ Fundamentally opposed to the diachronic assumptions of form and tradition criticism which tend to treat texts like mere patchworks, structural analysis attempts to give a full account of the synchronic, or morphological unity of a text. Because Judges 4 has often been considered to be a compilation (and a rather sloppy one at that) of disparate elements,⁶ the methods of structuralism are particularly germane to the narrative. Indeed, when treated from the vantage of structural analysis, Judges 4 yields a highly variegated and intimately connected structure. This structure may be mapped on the basis of the primary operative actantial categories, or '*functions*'

(following A.J. Greimas 1983). Judges 4 displays three basic actantial categories: *summons*, *command*, and *response*. Together these categories constitute the overall framework of the chapter, as well as the particular frame, or sequence of action, of its various scenes. What emerges from a structural mapping of these functions is a complex chiasitic structure,⁷ in which two primary scenes are juxtaposed, each containing or repeating in microstructure the structure of the whole.

A mapping of actantial functions in Judges 4 suggests the centrality of *command/response* exchange as a vehicle for the narrative. This exchange can be charted on two levels in the text: first, on the level of the macrostructure, or the overall sequence of scenes; and secondly, on the level of the microstructure, or the particular sequence of actions in each of the various scenes. On the level of the narrative macrostructure, there is a duplication of *command/response* exchange, forming the sequence of primary scenes, framed by a *summons* to the thematic introduction and conclusion. Four primary scenes are presented within the *summons* framework (vv. 1-3 and 23-24): (1) a *command* scene in which the protagonist's strategy for resolution of the thematic tension is formed (vv. 4-10); (2) a *response* scene in which the opponent assembles his troops against the helper (vv. 12-13); (3) a repeated *command* scene in which the protagonist's helper enacts his charge (vv. 14-16); and (4) a repeated *response* scene in which the protagonist's strategy is realized by a woman (vv. 17-22). For purposes of analytical shorthand, this sequence of scenes may be reduced to the following schema: (A) *summons* (vv. 1-3), (B) *command* (vv. 4-10), (C) *response* (vv. 12-13), (B') *command* (vv. 14-16), (C') *response* (vv. 17-22), (A') *summons* (vv. 23-24). This shorthand (A, B, C, B', C', A') will be helpful in the analysis of the sequence of actions in each of the various scenes.

Two scenes within the macrostructure repeat the actantial sequence of ABCB'C'A' in the microstructure of their particular actions: the *command scene* (B) of vv. 4-10, and the *response scene* (C') of vv. 17-22. This structural repetition forms a chiasitic relationship between the scenes of (B) and (C') which suggests the centrality of these scenes in the overall thematic development. Displaced by these two central scenes are the opponent's *response scene* (C) of vv. 12-13, and the helper's *command scene* (B') of vv. 14-16. These displaced scenes (C and B') have only a single *command/response* exchange, with no *summons* framework: in (C) there is

Sisera's *command* of his troops (b), their *response* in assembling against Barak (c); in (B') there is Deborah's *command* of Barak (b), and Barak's *response* (c) which constitutes an enactment of Yahweh's command.

In contrast to these displaced scenes, the sequence of actions in (B) and (C') are typified by their repetition within the framework of a *summons*. In vv. 4-10 the microstructure *abcb'c'a'* proceeds as follows: (a) Deborah *summons* Barak, v. 6a; (b) Deborah *commands* Barak, vv. 6b-7; (c) Barak *responds* with conditions, v. 8; (b') Deborah *transforms command* of Barak, v. 9a; (c') they *respond* by departing, v.9b; and (a') Barak *summons* his troops, v. 10. This microstructure appears in vv. 17-22 as well: (a) Jale *summons* Sisera, v. 18; (b) Sisera *commands* Jael, v. 19a; (c) Jael *responds* v. 19b; (b') Sisera *commands* Jael with conditions, v. 20; (c') Jael *responds* transformatively, v. 21; and (a') Jael *summons* Barak, v. 22. The macrostructure/microstructure relationships may thus be summarized in the following structural map of actantial functions.

It is interesting to note that the frame supplied to the macrostructure by the introductory summons of vv. 1-3 and the concluding summons of vv. 23-24 is not a function of the actants *per se*, but rather is a direct function of text/reader interaction. *We* are called in vv. 1-3 to witness the introduction of the thematic tension of the narrative, as well as its conclusion in vv. 23-24. Our witnessing of this tension requires, as already noted, a specification of the nature of that thematic tension. We are told in v. 3 that Israel cried for help, summoning Yahweh to overturn the oppression of Jabin's army and its commander, Sisera.

In the opening of the first scene, a woman, Deborah, assumes the position of primary actant. In vv. 4-5 the narrator provides a description of Deborah which is somewhat elaborate in the laconic context of the whole account. While the narrative action begins properly in v. 6, the descriptive narrative of vv. 4-5 should be seen as an integral part of the first scene (B). These verses identify resolutely the protagonist of the narrative theme, and call upon the reader to identify with this woman, who, by means of her status and power (prophetess and judge), assumes the command of Yahweh (b, vv. 6b-7) and *transforms* it (b', v. 9a) in a conclusive way.

At once it is clear that the story is not *simply* about the overturning of Jabin's oppression. We are summoned to remember the role of a specific woman (indeed, of two women working together) in the

Figure 1. A Structural Mapping of Actantial Functions in Judges 4

(A) vv. 1-3 Thematic Tension Introduced
(summons)
Reader Invited to Denounce
Oppression

(B') vv. 14-16 Helper's (Command)
(b) Deborah (commands) Barak
(c) Barak (responds) Enacting
Command

(B) vv. 4-10 Protagonist's Strategy Formed
(Command)

(C') vv. 17-22 Protagonist's Strategy Realized
(Response)

(a) Deborah (summons) Barak v. 6a
(b) Deborah (commands) Barak vv. 6b-7
(c) Barak (responds) to Deborah with conditions v. 8
(b') Deborah (commands) Barak transformatively v. 9a
(c') (Response) They depart v. 9b
(a') Barak (summons) Troops v. 10
(Deborah summons Jael?)

(a) Jael (summons) Sisera v. 18
(b) Sisera (commands) Jael v. 19a
(c) Jael (responds) v. 19b
(b') Sisera (commands) Jael with conditions v. 20
(c') Jael (responds) transformatively v. 21
(a') Jael (summons) Barak v. 22

(C) vv. 12-13 Opponent's (Response)
(b) Sisera (commands) Troops
(c) Troops (respond) Assemble
against Barak

(A') vv. 23-24 Thematic Tension Concluded
(summons)
Reader Invited to Celebrate
Victory over Oppression

resolution of this thematic tension. To be sure, without Deborah and Jael, there is no story to be told, literally no one to resolve the thematic tension. Thus, as readers we must assume the perspective of the female actants, if we are to witness fully the account to which we are summoned.

This necessity indicates an important element of the narrative focalization of Judges 4. Focalization, in the sense used here, has to do with 'how information about the fabula is presented to the reader' (Bal, 1985: 116). At first glance, the focalization of Judges 4 appears to be *external* to the characters, particularly in the descriptive narrative of vv. 4-5 in which Deborah is characterized by the narrator, who then introduces her initial action in v. 6a. However, in v. 6b the focalization shifts from narrator to character (Deborah) by way of the introduction of direct discourse. Verses 6b-9a sustain this type of *internal*, or *character* focalization through the use of the direct discourse of Deborah and Barak.

It is crucial to recognize that the key action of the narrative, the transformative command of Deborah (B)(b') which announces the transformative response of another female actant in (C')(c'), is focalized *internally*, and not with the narrator. Indeed, the crucial motives for action in Judges 4 lie outside of the story as focalized by the narrator. Thus, there is a tension in Judges 4 between the general *external* focalization—the 'vision' of the narrator—and *implicit* 'perceptions' which arise from the actions focalized *internally* by the characters.

This tension is central to the suspenseful interaction between Jael and Sisera in (C'). This scene, like that of (B), is focalized primarily internally, through the use of the direct discourse of Jael and Sisera. However, unlike (B), the transformative act is focalized by the narrator in v. 21. Within the vision of the narrator lies Deborah's transformative command and Jael's transformative response. Furthermore, the circumstances necessary for continuity in the thematic development are presented by the narrator in vv. 11 and 17. What does *not* lie within the narrator's vision is the specific connection between these events: how is it that Deborah's strategic command leads to Jael's strategic response? The answer to this question is not narrated, and therefore is *implicit* within the actions of the female actants. The only clue which indicates the potential outcome of the thematic development is supplied by the character Deborah in v. 9a. The reader who perceives and chooses to accept

this clue, and to imagine its overall implications for the thematic development, in effect knows more than does the narrator.

The 'clue' supplied by Deborah's transformation of command is linked structurally to the transformative response of Jael. Deborah's transformation of Yahweh's command in (B) (b') sets the strategy for resolution of the thematic tension; Jael brings this strategy to fruition in (C') (c') with her transformative response to Sisera's command. This structural linkage is heightened formally by the duplication of events in the two primary scenes (B & C'). In both scenes, the transformative acts follow upon conditional statements on the part of the male actants. In (B)(c) v. 8, Barak will only go (enact Yahweh's command) *if* ('*im*') attended by Deborah (conditional response). Similarly, in (C') (b') v. 20 Sisera commands Jael to respond negatively *if* ('*im*') someone asks such and so (conditional command). Over and against Barak's conditional response stands the transformed command of Deborah, announcing the decisive response of a woman. This decisive response follows immediately upon Sisera's conditional command to Jael.

Not only are the actions of Deborah (strategic command) and Jael (strategic response) linked in this way, they also are counterbalanced artfully against the conditional actions of the helper (Barak) and opponent (Sisera). Where Barak responds with conditions, Jael takes decisive action; where Deborah takes transformative command, Sisera stipulates the conditions of his command. Overall, the effect of the narrative structure is to link two seemingly unrelated scenes by virtue of their balance in inverse proportion. Verse 11 (along with v. 17) is the solid link in this structure—a kind of scaffolding whose presence in the text signifies the overall relationship. Verse 11 is not merely a late device sloppily injected to make two disparate stories cohere.⁸ By virtue of its indicating the overall connection between the two primary scenes of action (B & C'), v. 11 does more than offer the minimally necessary details about the scene of Sisera's death. While it is true that verse 11 functions in this way, it would be a departure from our reading to focus on the male opponent in this case, and thereby *abandon* the focalization of the female actants. The more important connection, for our reading, is the one supplied by verse 11 between Deborah and Jael. Verse 11 signifies, but cannot explicate (we might say 'cloaks'), what the reader imagines to be a detailed plot worked out by Deborah and Jael, as announced in (B) (b') and realized in (C') (c'). The 'cloak' is clearly visible; what lies

behind it is not—yet it functions. Just as Sisera lay unknowing beneath the rug with which Jael had covered him, so we the readers cannot see beneath the cloak until the plot has been realized. Then, and only then, does the cloak begin to signify fully its design.

It is important to pause and assess the extent to which my '*inferential walk*' parts ways with other dominant readings. Most notably, by way of the commitments to women as actants in both the designated narrative theme and the postulated special case of narrative focalization, my reading counters those which have taken male action as central, and thus have treated the female actions as problematic. A typical example of this traditional reading may be seen in Soggin's determination to make Barak the proper subject of action in Judges 4. He writes:

Barak is ready to go only if he is offered certain guarantees, even if the guarantee may cost him his fame. By means of this reasoning, the redactors transfer the character of protagonist from the person who really had this role, Barak, to the prophetess (Soggin 1981: 73).

This tendency of traditional readings to obscure the centrality of action on the part of the women is most absurdly exemplified in the commentary offered by John Gray, in which the description of Deborah in vv. 4-5 is treated as 'digression', or merely a 'redactional gloss' (Gray 1986: 255). Even if one were to accept Gray's interpretation as an accurate assessment of the production of Judges 4, one would be hard pressed to justify it on even its own terms—why would male redactors *introduce* Deborah so that she could be mistakenly identified as protagonist? The process of reasoning in both Soggin's and Gray's accounts is circuitous, smacking of rationalizations not present in the text, which, indeed, expose the ideological pre-commitments of their assumed narrative theme.

Rather than assume the centrality of women's action in the resolution of the thematic tension, these commentators would like to make it a subsidiary consideration, only important to the extent to which it speaks to male power and action in the story. Hence, Deborah's transformative command appears merely as a punitive measure of Yahweh, exacted by 'the redactors', to make a moral example of Barak's cowardice. A typical result of such a reading is to focus on the actions of the opponent (C) and helper (B'), as if the battle scene (C & B') were the central event of the story.⁹ In this way, the significance of the links between Deborah and Jael are down-

played, thereby draining the story of its compositional and suggestive impact.¹⁰

The male actants should be read in subordinate roles of opponent and helper, commensurate with their placement within the narrative structure. So it is that Sisera's response in (C) is subordinated to that of Jael in (C'), just as Barak's command in (B') is subordinate to Deborah's transformative command in (B). This reading, then, displaces the battle scene (C & B') and its implicit commitment to the male actants, effectively subordinating these roles to the primary scenes of (B) and (C'), in which structural connections suggest the centrality of collaborative action on the part of the female actants. Far from being a story about male power and its improper exercise, this is a story about *female* power directed against patriarchal oppression, conveyed by *means* of a complex and unified chiasmic structure.

Barak never figures as the subject at the thematic level of the story. He is summoned (as are we) in (B) to witness Yahweh's command and Deborah's transformation of it. His action only *occasions* this transformation and is not involved in its actualization. This feature of Barak's role is ironically demonstrated at the close of the story's action, where Barak, in pursuit of Sisera, is again summoned by a woman (Jael) to witness what in fact has already been achieved. Similarly, Jael summoned Sisera, who, operating at the level of assumed peaceful relations between his clan and Jael's, was unaware of the motives of Jael. These motives are clearly tied to those of Deborah, who announces the design (v. 9a), but does not disclose its specifics. On the other hand, Jael cannot announce her design to Sisera, but effectively discloses its specifics in one fall of the mallet.

We are summoned, as were Barak and Sisera, to witness an unexpected event. The oppression of Jabin (which means 'yoke')¹¹ will in fact be undermined—but, *not in the traditional fashion, by men, on the battlefield*. The crux of effective action lies in the hands of the women, occurs clandestinely behind the backdrop of the battle, and is realized in the recesses of Jael's tent while Sisera lies covered and sleeping. These actions are cloaked, but related nonetheless. To the extent that we choose to read with the male actants, we are duped by this cloak; to the extent that we read with the female actants, we begin to see through the cloak to the intricate structure it disguises.

This feature of the characterization of Judges 4—the ability on the

part of the reader to identify with any of the characters involved—indicates something about the cultural circulation of themes. Particular themes gain ascendancy through their articulation by and identification in particular characters. It is in this way that the techniques of narrative characterization, combined with the pragmatics of reading, result in a dialectical interaction between cultural themes and the characters designated as their bearers. Thus it is that Judges 4 supports both the traditional theme identified above and the theme advanced here—the difference is one of ideology, and, as a result, of the characters with whom the reader will identify. The choices we make as readers are not without consequences. An awareness of this fact brings to light the responsibility inherent in the act of reading.

Much more can be said of this rich tapestry and of what it may signify. For now, however, a mapping of the narrative structure of Judges 4 is sufficiently sketched. Its conclusions may be compared to an exploration of a neighboring myth, the Canaanite tale of Aghat, which can be regarded as a thematic prototype for a reversal in the Hebrew narrative of Judges 4. It will be shown that these insights lend support to the suggestions of our narratological analysis of the Hebrew account.

Reading with a Sub-Text: Ideology and Transformation in Judges 4

Formulaic as well as philological connections have often been marshalled as evidence for literary transfer between the story of Judges 4 and Canaanite myths.¹² Such connections abound in texts of the ancient near east—indeed, the very high occurrence of such connections is in itself perhaps the best argument against a facile determination of cause-effect relationships between texts and cultures, intertextuality and intercultural exchange. The use here of the Canaanite tale of *Aghat* is not interested in promoting a problematic claim regarding the historical dependence of one text upon the other, and thereby of one culture upon the other.

Furthermore, it does not necessitate the general assumptions of, say, F.M. Cross regarding the Hebrew transformation of Canaanite myth into epic form (Cross 1973). Of course, the cultural contiguity of Israel and Canaan cannot be disregarded completely, but for the present purposes, a particular attitude about this relationship is not of primary importance. Rather, I will choose the tale of Aghat as a

sub-text whose theme may be used to illuminate the transformation of ideology at work in Judges 4.

A thematic mapping of the tale of *Aghat*¹³ requires, as did that of Judges 4, the initial identification of a narrative theme. In many ways, the theme of the tale of *Aghat* is much more easily identified than that of Judges 4, despite the fragmentary nature of *Aghat*'s remains. The tale of *Aghat* begins with a scene which fully explicates the central thematic message and conflict: Daniel is bewailing the lack of a son to be his legitimate heir and provider in his old age. Indeed, from the opening lines of *Aghat* to its dramatic and unfortunately curtailed conclusion (the tablet is broken off at the end), the theme of *Aghat* can be taken as *the ultimate importance of the establishment and maintenance of patriarchal order*. *Aghat* is comprised of two sub-stories in which the narrative theme is played out.

In the first scene, through a process of ritual offerings and the intercession of Baal to plead Daniel's case before El, a son is granted to Daniel (*Aghat*) and order is restored. However, this patriarchal equilibrium does not last for long—an immediate threat is introduced by the appearance of a female opponent, Anat. Thus, in the second sub-story, in which *Aghat* is the sole sustainer of the patriarchal line, the established order is threatened by the appearance of a strong-willed and powerful woman. Under the characterization of the opponent Anat as a covetous and fickle woman, the reader is asked to denounce with *Aghat* Anat's desire for his bow, the sign of his status and power. Despite Anat's generous offer of immortality to *Aghat*, she is responded to as a liar, who, being a woman, could not use a soldier's weapon anyway. Anat warns *Aghat* that his condescending attitude will be reprimanded; apparently, *Aghat* pays no heed.

After a threat to El himself (who assures Anat she will not be thwarted), a plot is then devised by Anat with her attendant, Yatpan, for the murder of *Aghat* and procurement of his bow. Anat's plan meets with half-success: Yatpan, in the form of an eagle, destroys *Aghat*; but the bow is broken and plummets into the sea. A time of severe famine ensues. Daniel mourns the loss of his heir while his daughter, Pughat, vows revenge against the opponents, Anat and Yatpan, thereby restoring patriarchal justice. Pughat goes to Yatpan's tent, disguised as his friend and leader, Anat. They drink, Yatpan boasts of his deed, and Pughat's heart is reported to be like that of a serpent. Her weapons lie ready beneath her disguise—then, the

tablet breaks off. The second sub-story is left with its thematic tension (revenge for an infraction of patriarchal order) unresolved. The reader imagines the fateful conclusion as the disguise is removed and Pughat's intentions are revealed.

There are many possible points of comparison between the two texts. P.C. Craigie, for example, has made a strong case for the relationship of the Anat/Yatpan duo to the Deborah/Barak duo of Judges 4 and 5 (Craigie 1978). Craigie's correlation of Anat and Deborah is based upon the parallel occurrence of various characteristic images of both women. However, Craigie's account disregards a fundamental element of these stories: viz., in the context of the tale of *Aghat*, Anat appears in a negative light, as opponent to the success of the protagonist's narrative theme; whereas in Judges 4 and 5, Deborah (at least under our reading) is the protagonist, is portrayed in a positive light, and is responsible with Jael for the successful resolution of the narrative theme. Craigie is correct in noting actantial parallels: his analysis unfortunately fails to point out the reversal which these parallels demonstrate. Not only is Deborah *not* an opponent (as Anat in *Aghat*), she is a protagonist in support of a theme antithetical to *Aghat's*: *the subversion of patriarchal order*. Both stories depict the women as effective actors against male power—yet these portraits are displayed in two different kinds of light. If we are to understand Deborah's action with reference to Anat, we must keep in mind the differences in the narrative themes and the implications which arise from the transformation in Judges 4.

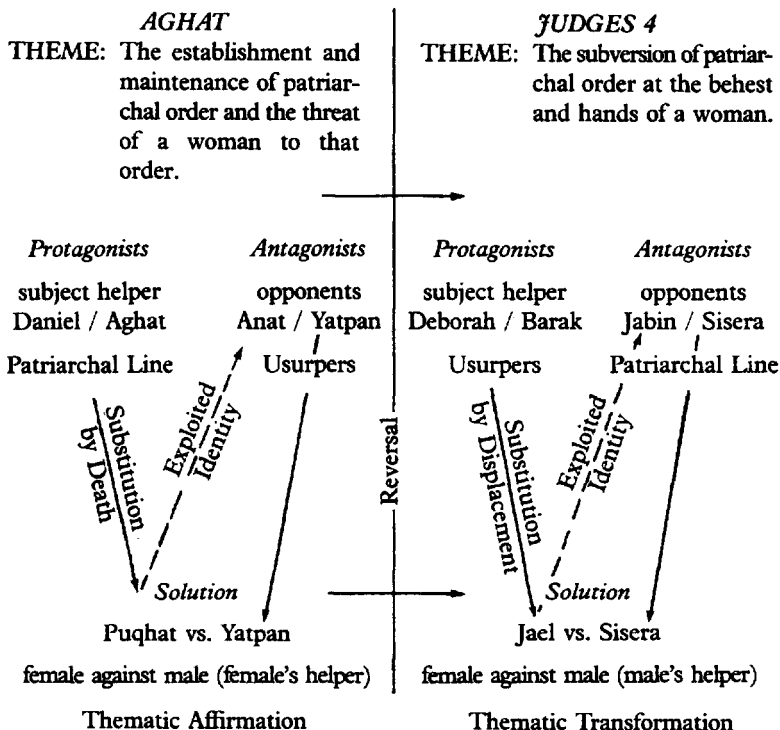
An even cursory evaluation of the thematic arrangement of characters in Judges 4 and the tale of *Aghat* reveals the absurdity of drawing direct parallels between Anat/Yatpan and Deborah/Barak. Indeed, the most striking parallel is between the unfortunately incomplete story of Pughat's plan of revenge against Yatpan—parallel to Jael's plot against Sisera. Interestingly enough, P.C. Craigie relegates this connection to a mere footnote reference (376n6). But this connection is worth greater recognition, for if Yatpan is to be correlated to Sisera in this way, then he cannot also be the model for Barak, as Craigie would like to read. Indeed, if the reader is to take the duo of Deborah/Barak as a direct parallel to that of Anat/Yatpan, then the connection between the scenes of resolution must be ignored. A careful reading with a sub-text demands a systematic use of parallels—one motif cannot be used in two ways.

The challenge of this use of the sub-text parallels is to salvage the connection between Pughat and Jael, while yet retaining the significance of the Deborah/Barak and Anat/Yatpan relationships.

Because Sisera is the lackey of Jabin in the Hebrew narrative, appearing as opponent to the narrative theme, there seems to be a reversal in the protagonist (male/male) and antagonist (female/male) relationships. Likewise, the Deborah/Barak relationship substitutes for the Daniel/Aghat relationship, thereby removing the significance of progeny and death of the male heir as the point of the story. Rather, in the Hebrew narrative, contention is centered on Jabin's oppression of the Hebrew tribes. Instead of a story of a woman's undermining of patriarchal power, portrayed in negative terms, the story in the Hebrew account is transmuted into one of women's power functioning in the liberation of the tribes from Canaanite patriarchal domination. In this reversal, all of the positive/strong characteristics of Anat are drawn upon (as Craigie observes) in order to portray Deborah as protagonist. It is interesting to note that Barak, unlike the Canaanite protagonist Aghat, does not mock or underestimate the power of a woman. This respect on the part of Barak marks the critical difference between his fate and that of Aghat.

In both stories, the thematic tension is resolved in favor of the protagonists by means of a *helper substitution* (in both cases a woman). Aghat's substitution comes by way of death—a direct consequence of his mocking of Anat. Even though portrayed negatively, Anat can still act effectively. Because Aghat's death is viewed negatively from the thematic level, the substitute can only appear as subordinate to the thematic concern. Contrariwise, Barak's substitution comes about naturally in the narrative—he is simply displaced without protest. Here there are no negative connotations with this displacement, and thus the substitute is not subordinated by thematic concern. As a result, Jael's action can produce a *thematic transformation* and not, as with Pughat's action, merely a *thematic affirmation*. Unlike Pughat, Jael does not act to *restore* patriarchal justice; rather, her action decisively *subverts* such justice. Aghat begins with a situation of patriarchal order and proceeds through its consolidation, breakdown, and repair. Judges 4 begins with the same situation and transforms it. Thus, the relationship between the sub-text and the primary text may be schematized as follows:

Figure 2



Conclusion

Both women act to achieve thematic resolution by means of exploiting the identity of the opponent's counterpart. Pughat dresses up like Anat in order to deal a blow to Anat by eliminating her duped lackey. Similarly, Jael exploits the irenic relations between her clan and Jabin's in order to undercut Jabin's power and that of his equally unsuspecting lackey. Both women must act as allies to their victims if they are to bring the protagonist's cause to fruition. Hence, both women are deceivers: one for the cause of patriarchy, the other for its demise.

As thrown into relief by the sub-text of *Aghat*, the proposed reading of the Hebrew narrative suggests a plausible transformation of ideology which conveys women as full actants responsible for

calling forth a new and unexpected event. In this intertextual exchange, Deborah and Jael are summoning Pughat to act for their cause, and not for the patriarchs. As readers, we are called to witness this unexpected transformation in the full measure of its meaning. Thus we return to Eco's notion of the fabula as '*inferential walk*' in which the 'call' of a text leads to an action (reaction) on the part of the reader. Whether this action be one of response or of neglect (itself a form of response), the reader cannot escape the responsibility of her or his participation in the narrative process. It is precisely this responsibility which the transformative acts of Deborah and Jael challenge us to face.

Notes

1. This traditional assumption is the guiding principle of most commentaries. For examples see: Soggin, 1981; Gray, 1986; and Sternberg, 1985.

2. Chapter 8, especially.

3. For example, Mieke Bal uses this distinction to help point out the function of ideology at the level of characterization or the *story level* according to her distinctions. Bal, 1985.

4. Even Meir Sternberg's attentive treatment of Hebrew narrative is dominated by this supposition. Thus we read that Deborah appears '*as a variation on the theme of the incongruous deliverer*', and not as an actant in her own right. Sternberg focuses on Barak as the proper central figure and reads Deborah's actions only as they relate to Barak's. Sternberg then concludes that Barak's conditional response to Deborah in v. 8 proves *him* to be the true 'woman', because he relies upon Deborah '*to do a man's job. . .*'. Such conclusions invite condemnation to the reading which produces them.

5. For example, see Michael Fishbane's study, 'Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle: Genesis 25.19-35.22', 1975: 15-38.

6. This approach can be seen in most commentaries. In particular, see John Gray, 1986.

7. This structure may interestingly be compared to that described by Fishbane with reference to the Jacob Cycle.

8. Here, G.F. Moore has made a similar point: 'The narrator pauses here, before going on to describe the battle, to say what was necessary about the scene of Sisera's death. . . the verse is therefore in a suitable place, and not superfluous by the side of v. 17; there is no reason for regarding it as an addition of the last editor'. 1895: 118.

9. For example, see D.H. Mayes, 'The Historical Context of the Battle Against Sisera', 1969: 353-60.

10. Again, Gray's commentary typifies this proclivity.
11. See Soggin: 85.
12. P.C. Craigie's 'Deborah and Anat: A Study in Poetic Imagery', 1978: 374-81, is representative of the guarded optimism with which such attempts at suggesting literary transfer are made.
13. The text used here is that of J.C.L. Gibson and G.R. Driver, in *Canaanite Myths and Legends* 1977: 103-22, text 17.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMAN IN READINGS OF THE STORY OF DEBORAH

Jane Shaw

My intention in this paper is to look at two contemporary, popular rewritings of the story of Deborah, in Judges 4 and 5: Ellis 1982: 73-75 and Nunally-Cox 1981: 48-50. (See also appendixes 1 and 2.) Both rewritings are by women, written in the early 1980s, and yet each arrives at a very different conclusion as to what sort of role model Deborah should be for women today. By looking at some of the developments in modern literary theory, I will consider the processes of interpretation which enable multiple readings of a text to be made, and will ask what implications such multiple readings have. By considering the contexts or circumstances in which such readings are made, I will ask what political or ideological ends they serve. Most importantly, I will ask how readings such as these contribute to the cultural construction of gender, in particular the creation of the coherent subject 'woman'.

There has been, in the modern period, a 'shift from an infallibilist ideal of science with its quest for certainty to a thoroughgoing fallibilism' and this 'constitutes one of the watersheds in the history of scientific philosophy. Such fallibilism constitutes a profound epistemic revolution' (Schüssler Fiorenza 1986: 127). This shift has had profound effects on all methods of interpretation, marking a realization, as it does, that we can no longer speak of, or search for, The Truth or reality 'out there'. Much modern literary theory has therefore attempted to explore this and explain our inability to claim that we have objective readings of the texts; for this 'profound epistemic revolution' forces us to recognize that there is no external standard by which we could judge what an objective reading is. Our standards, be they historical or of contemporary human experience,

necessarily exist within the cultural tradition and social and political framework in which each one of us stands. Our standards are thus particular to ourselves and to that context in which each one of us stands. For a feminist reading of a text, this means that concepts previously thought universal, and presented as universal, can often be seen as coming out of particular social frameworks and cultures, out of the dominant discourses, primarily shaped by particular groups of men and serving their particular purposes.

In our western culture, God (the Father) has traditionally been seen as the source or center of certain knowledge, and the Bible the text of that knowledge. Each interpreter has thus claimed, and many continue to claim, that they have *the* objective reading of the Bible, or certain biblical texts, and thus they have The Truth. Such claims to have The Truth have been used, and continue to be used, by many of those in power to pursue their particular desires, needs and beliefs—the crusades, anti-semitism, the subordination of women, racism, the atrocities of the Inquisition, to name just some of the outstandingly horrific examples: in short, the interpretation of the Bible is a highly political issue.

The Bible has operated in western culture as a classic, to use Hans Georg Gadamer's term: that is, a text seen as a timeless manifestation of truth in our historical mode of existence, and therefore normative because it has something of 'truth' to say to each generation. Indeed, the Bible might be described as *the* classic of classics and therefore *the* timeless manifestation of truth. Because of the Bible's status in western civilization, then, people wishing to lend weight to their particular ways of viewing how we should relate to each other in our social framework, how that social framework should be organised and so on, have used biblical texts not only to support their views but to give origins to their views, to claim an authority for them beyond all human authority—God. In turn, interpretations of the Bible have been received as 'truth' and have had an impact on the way our tradition has been shaped (this Gadamer would call the Bible's effective history).

A political critique points up the dangers of setting up a text as normative in this way, by looking at the political situation and structures of power in which we live, and asking who has the power to designate certain texts as classics and whose texts have been designated classics. In a society where some have been educated and others have not, where power has gone hand in hand with that

education, and where one sex has had power over the other, then it can be clearly seen that it is not mere merit which promotes a text to the status of a classic. This is a particularly pertinent point with regard to the texts of the Bible which, having been written under the conditions of patriarchy (recognising that patriarchy takes many different forms in different periods and cultures), might be taken to be androcentric.¹

Here, then, a feminist might approach biblical texts and their subsequent interpretations—their effective history—with suspicion.² Moreover, this feminist analysis starts from the point that ‘the inequality of the sexes is neither a biological given nor a divine mandate, but a cultural construction’ (Greene and Kahn 1985: 1). In this case, it is necessary to see how interpretations of the Bible are used to construct notions of what is ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’, how certain biological bodies are ascribed ‘male’ and ‘female’,³ how those bodies should behave, and thus how such human constructions are ascribed the authority of God. I hope to illustrate this point in my analysis of the two re-readings of Judges 4 and 5.

Janice Nunally-Cox’s and Ivy Ellis’ rewritings of the story of Deborah came from a genre, particularly prevalent in the last few years, of books usually titled something like ‘Women of the Bible’.⁴ With the impact of the women’s movement on Christianity—on many facets of western society—those both for and against feminism have turned anew to the ‘authority’ of the Bible to find appropriate texts which can be employed to pronounce what it *really* means to be ‘woman’ or ‘man’, and thus to give role models to women and men—though primarily to give role models to women because they are the ones seen as deviating from what has been set up as the norm for their behaviour, whether that deviation is seen as liberation or undesirable. The Bible having so few stories of women like Deborah, whose role seems to deviate from the norm designated for women, it is not surprising that such stories are immediately picked up by those wanting to contribute to the debate today and wanting to give biblical authority to their views on the nature and roles of the sexes. I would suggest, then, that the story of Deborah is an ‘ideo-story’ to use Mieke Bal’s term.⁵ It is the kind of text—because of its status and because its content touches on issues which are a subject of contention in the historical and political circumstances in which we live—which allows people to interpret it in ways which enable them

to confirm or shape and then promote their ideologies, in this case, their opinions on the position of women.

What has been described as the effective history of a text can be described as contributing to the construction and spread of those various discourses which have been given the umbrella name of ideology (and this is the term with which I shall work). Alice Jardine, working out of Louis Althusser's approach to ideology, sees

ideology as the conceptual glue of culture, that which makes culture seem natural, that which holds any cultural system together, that which, in fact, makes any system of relationships seem natural (1985: 85).

The danger of ideology is that it functions and is made to function as though there were some ultimate truth, as though certain concepts were given. Ideology plays an important part in the cultural construction of gender and the subsequent presentation of such constructions as natural. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt write, 'Ideology is a system of representations through which we experience ourselves as well, for the work of ideology is to construct coherent subjects' (1985: xix). Nunally-Cox and Ellis, in these rewritings, are attempting to construct coherent subjects: Deborah is made into a coherent subject who can function as a role model primarily for themselves but for other women too, and thus the authors themselves and 'woman' in general are constructed in that mould.

However, ideology is not something transparent (Barrett 1985: 79), deliberately imposed by the authors. The author herself may be unaware of the social conditions (indeed, the ideologies) which affect her thinking. It is therefore unhelpful to think of the imposition of ideology as occurring in a crude or heavy handed way because for the most part (there are exceptions) it does not function in that way. Newton and Rosenfelt write:

Ideology, then, is not a set of deliberate distortions imposed on us from above, but a complex and contradictory system of representations (discourse, image and myth) through which we experience ourselves in relation to each other and to the social structures in which we live (1985: xix).

Ideology does not function independently of the systems in which we are positioned and thus we all, unconsciously or consciously, play a

part in its workings. Teresa de Lauretis says, 'one's identity is interpreted or reconstructed by each of us within the horizon of meanings and knowledge available in the culture at given historical moments' (1986: 8).

Both Nunally-Cox and Ellis are constructing their own identities from within the discourses available to them, from within particular ideologies of 'woman'. For both of them, the Bible (or, rather, certain biblical texts) have clearly been key to this. But they are not only constructing their own identities, but identities for other women: they are taking, from their readings of a biblical text, a norm as to what 'woman' should be and are therefore suggesting that this is how all women should behave. They are doing this in a way deliberately designed to influence, to reach others, to be a part of certain discourses, by publishing their views within a popular genre. Here it is worth noting the part that such popular literature plays in the creation and interpretation of ideas within discourses. It is usual for biblical critics and literary theorists in the academy to refuse to acknowledge such interpretations as valid, indeed considering them as unworthy of their notice. But such popular texts, because they are popular, are ensured a widespread, and sometimes large, readership. I would maintain that such popular texts play an important part in the spreading of ideology (alongside other 'more serious' texts, television shows, advertisements and so on) and thus are integral parts of the prevailing discourses about gender. Moreover, they have the stamp of authority upon them because they are biblical interpretations, and will be taken, by some readers, as *The Truth*.

In this discussion, I want to remember that it is primarily men who have shaped the prevailing ideologies about 'woman' and 'man', and that it is in discourses dominated by men that those ideologies have come about. Under these conditions, then, women have learned what their nature and roles are said to be. De Lauretis writes: "man" and "woman" are both constructs of a male centered discourse, both are products of the "straight mind" (1986: 13). Hence, Ellis and Nunally-Cox are both working with androcentric texts and with concepts of 'woman' and 'man' as defined in certain ways. Though their two interpretations of the Judges text are in many ways contradictory, there are similarities in their assumptions and the discourses from which they stem. Both women are seeking role models for themselves as 'woman' (a norm). The first word of the title of Nunally-Cox's book, *Foremothers* suggests that, and she writes in her introduction that she is looking for a history:

I am now trying to see the history: move beyond and behind and away from the biblical stories themselves; move back to the Goddess of 25,000 BC, move forward to women priests of 2,000 AD—see the movement, the suppression, the abiding strength (1981: xii).

She is looking for a tradition of women who have deviated from the norm for woman's role and have thus shown strength and independence in the context of the submissive roles constructed for them within patriarchal societies (though one might argue about the nature of society in the time of the Goddess of 25,000 BC). Even though she says she is moving away from the biblical texts, her book and her position as an Episcopal priest suggest that she considers them important and authoritative. Thus Nunally-Cox is not seeking new role models, nor is she seeking new conceptions of what it means to be a woman or a man; she is, rather, looking for definitions and concepts already in existence, for traditions within the tradition, which have endured despite the construction of woman as inferior to man, and the physical oppression generally preventing women from assuming stronger roles.

Ellis, and the other Roman Catholic sisters who have contributed essays to this book, are looking for role models too: the foreword to the whole book says that the women of the Bible are 'close to our experience' and 'we shall find in one or another of those with whom we can identify—those from whose lives we can draw particular comfort or courage' (1982: v). They too are turning to the Bible to find a tradition, but a quite different one from that sought by Nunally-Cox.

Life for a 'mother in Israel' has changed out of all recognition but in spiritual matters, in relationships within the family, in ecclesial life, in acts of tenderness and deeds of constancy, the sister's role is still the same. Her adorning, then and now, is the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price (1982: v).

They are looking for a tradition of submissiveness on the part of women which has endured in spite of all changes in the structures of society which have challenged all the constructions of women as weak, inferior and the like. They want to argue that in all matters—ecclesial, spiritual, familial—the role of women *really* remains changeless, and should continue to do so.

These statements of intention are helpful but cannot be the sole criteria for, or means of, digging out the ideological aims in their work. Trends in hermeneutics and literary theory in general which have placed an emphasis on the author's intention—Schleiermacher's hermeneutics (1977) and, more recently, E.D. Hirsch's work in interpretations (1967)—have also strived towards obtaining the objective reading of the text, assuming that understanding the author's intention is possible and that it gives *the* accurate method of understanding the text. Such an approach suggests that the author does indeed have a set of 'conscious' intentions and it assumes that we can get at those intentions. It may be that this approach can aid an understanding of Nunally-Cox's and Ellis' own hermeneutical positions though: as interpreters of the Bible they may well be seeking The Author's—God's—intentions; they may well be seeking original pronouncements, believing that there is such a fixed message in the texts, that only has to be discovered.

Other developments in modern literary theory which have sought the objective readings of texts are also unhelpful. The Formalists (including the American New Critics) turned their attention away from the author and to the text, to find fixed meanings in the text's style and structure at the verbal level. The Structuralists have tried to articulate and identify what they believe to be the deep structures underneath the text. Though there may be such structures, common to certain sorts of texts, and elements of style used in certain forms of literature, it cannot be forgotten that these literary forms and structures are themselves created by the critic/writer. Moreover, these approaches attempt to divorce the reader from the text. But the text cannot stand apart from the reader, because the reader in some sense gives meaning to the text. The reader's pre-understandings (which come out of her cultural, social and political position) give her material which enables her to put questions to the text, a text standing in that same social framework as the reader, and thus she can receive answers from or come to some sort of understanding of that text (Heidegger 1966: 331-34; Gadamer 1984: *passim*).

The question remains, however, as to whether the reader simply imposes her pre-understandings (and therefore her ideologies) onto the text, regardless of its content and literary form; or whether there is something inherent in the text, in its form and style, which means that it is bound to yield multiple meanings. In addressing the latter

possibility, Paul Ricoeur's notion of the surplus meaning of the text, or its semantic possibility, might be useful. In this way, the reader appropriates the text for herself, though this is not simply to impose her views onto the text. For Ricoeur, the text's structure allows for the multiple interpretations. The text itself elicits our participation, proposing to us that we should see the world as it is (re)described within it; but our understanding of the text—our interpretation—is necessarily our own. Ricoeur makes the important point that all words are polysemic, and the form of word(s) which epitomizes this is the metaphor or symbol (1981).

To illustrate the point, I will look at an example of a metaphor from the Judges text and the interpretation of it by Nunally-Cox and Ellis. In Judg. 5.7 Deborah is described as 'Mother in Israel'. It seems to be this phrase which gives Nunally-Cox reason to describe Deborah (along with Jael) as a national heroine. She takes the phrase up directly when she describes Deborah as the 'true "mother in Israel"' in comparison with the weak-kneed Barak who needs continual encouragement from that true mother in Israel. Thus here, the metaphor is interpreted as representing a strong woman who takes charge in a victory for Israel when the male military commander is 'weak-kneed'. And, as I have already suggested, the word 'foremothers' in the title of Nunally-Cox's books suggests the kinds of interpretations she will make, the type of figure she is seeking out, and thus the way in which she would interpret a metaphor involving 'mother'.

Ellis, on the other hand, interprets the metaphor to make a statement about the state of motherhood. She admits that Barak is weak, and that Deborah's strength supports his weakness, but she understands the absence of Deborah's name—but inclusion of Barak's—in the list of faithful women and men in Hebrews 11 in terms of 'mother in Israel' being an accolade which could not be surpassed. This therefore gives Ellis an opening to discuss the merits of motherhood in the traditional patriarchal family structure:

Many women today clamour for the so called liberation of their sex. The wise woman will realise that she has a great deal of power to control present and future events. The mother has the training of the child during its most formative years, and the wife can help sustain and guide her husband. Did not God form Eve as a helpmeet? A woman who trusts in the Lord does not rely on her own understanding, but always acknowledges God in her daily life

and allows Him to guide her way. She will, as Deborah before her, be a guide, counsellor and support to her husband, children and the community in which she lives, always ready with the helping hand and kind word, a support to those weak in faith, a Mother in spiritual Israel.

There appears, then, to be semantic potential in the text, which allows multiple interpretations—indeed, allows nothing but multiple interpretations. However, the way in which a reader interprets the metaphor is shaped by her pre-understandings. How each of these women interpret the metaphor involving the word ‘mother’ is vital because motherhood has been seen and employed as central in the constructions of ‘woman’. Woman’s function in the matter of reproduction, and the different ways in which her body has been understood to function in this respect in different periods and cultures, have been used to make assumptions about her physical ability, her intellectual capability, her capacity for making moral decisions and her social position in relation to man. Women’s lives have been materially shaped by the function of bearing children.

To understand why these women differently interpret the symbol in the ways that they do, it is useful to look at the context of their lives, the discourses by which they might have been influenced, and therefore what they bring to the text—what Jürgen Habermas would call their societal context and life praxis (1984). I have already pointed out the context of the debate about the nature and roles of woman and man to which Nunally-Cox and Ellis are contributing—namely the questions of feminists about traditional assumptions about ‘woman’ and the resulting concrete changes in women’s position in society. As a result of such questions and changes, Nunally-Cox has been ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church. She has been given choices and options in her life, and the possibility of doing something her foremothers could not do. The Roman Catholic church has not opened up its hierarchies to women and it still retains many of its traditional teachings on the nature and position of women. Ellis is a nun in that church: she has assumed a role traditionally allowed to women by the church’s hierarchy (though the way different nuns shape their roles within such limits varies widely). To put these women into some sort of context is to enhance an understanding of what kinds of assumptions and beliefs and experiences shape their ways of interpreting the text, and the kinds of input they want to make in the arenas of discourse about ‘woman’.

The question, already posed, still remains: does the reader simply impose her assumptions and beliefs on the text or does the text somehow affect or shape the way the reader interprets it? This question has been discussed by reader-response critics who have turned the emphasis away from the text or the author and towards the reader, an emphasis which tends to erode and then finally destroy the idea of the objectivity of the text. Stanley Fish takes this to the ultimate limit whereby the text itself disappears (1980). Reading is not discovering what the text means but the process of experiencing what it does to you, and Fish goes so far as to say that the reader creates the text. Fish's theory therefore puts into question the possibility of there being any meaning in the text of Judges 4 and 5. Are there meanings in the text which Nunally-Cox and Ellis pull out, or do they simply read onto (into) the text exactly what they want, giving authority to their views by claiming that such views are to be found in the Bible? Are they truly searching for meaning or simply searching for authority for meanings they have totally created? Was there something in the metaphor 'mother in Israel' which allowed them to make their different interpretations, or was it, after all, only a convenient place in which to state (in the case of Ellis) or not state (for Nunally-Cox) their views on motherhood? Their views are, after all, quite polarised. Maybe this polarisation illustrates the complete indeterminacy of a text's meaning and maybe this is the point to which 'thoroughgoing fallibilism' takes us in approaching literary texts? And yet, the metaphor involved the word 'mother': in the context in which Nunally-Cox and Ellis were interpreting—where the signifier 'mother' still refers most frequently to the signified 'woman who has children'—then this involved them in making some kind of statement about motherhood, or in ignoring it, and it is possible to learn much about someone's assumptions and ideologies from what they choose to ignore or omit.

Do we, rather, receive a text in the way that Wolfgang Iser has suggested in his reception theory? (1980). Iser maintains that a text is made up of certain fixed points or outlines, and the reader fills in the gaps in his or her own way. A text is, therefore, potentially capable of various different realisations and no single reading can ever exhaust the full potential. I would suggest further that the filling in occurs not because of literal gaps (though this might be the case sometimes) in the text but because of the polyvalent nature of words. I would argue that the fixed point are the words themselves which have semantic

possibility. The reader thus uses the fixed points to 'strive, even if unconsciously, to fit everything together in a consistent pattern' (Iser 1980: 58). I would suggest that Nunally-Cox and Ellis are in some sense doing this—filling in the gaps—to make a consistent pattern, to construct the coherent pattern. And those coherent patterns are made from the 'horizon of meanings and knowledges available in the culture at given historical moments' to quote de Lauretis again (1986: 8). I would also suggest that this ideo-story is a structure—and a convenient one, because it has authority—on which these women can hang their beliefs about woman.

I will try to illustrate this point by briefly examining some of the key fixed points in the text as they are taken up and filled out by Ellis and Nunally-Cox. Both take up Deborah's position as a prophet (Judg. 4.14; 5.12) as a starting point. How do they differently interpret the word prophet or fill in the gaps as to what a prophet means in terms of activities, status and so on? For Ellis, Deborah's position as a prophetess (and it is worth note that she uses the 'feminine' form of the word) has to be explained (away) in terms of her being a judge *only* in the non-military sense of the word. Therefore what she does is consult regarding tribal differences and family problems, the family being the traditional sphere of woman. In this way, Ellis bypasses the potential awkwardness of Deborah's prominent position—a prominence a woman should not have (at least not in the 'public' sphere) according to Ellis' gender-specific standards. For Nunally-Cox, this title—though she does not know how Deborah earned it—makes Deborah a woman who 'stands clearly on her own' and she interprets Deborah as a judge in Israel to whom all people came for counsel. For Nunally-Cox, Deborah can judge all things and all people, not just in the sphere usually assigned to woman, because Nunally-Cox wants to set precedents for women holding positions of authority usually kept by and for men.

Deborah's summons of and command to Barak, to gather his troops and meet the enemy's general, Sisera, is a key part of the plot for Ellis and Nunally-Cox. Significantly, for Nunally-Cox, Barak is *Deborah's* commander, and for Ellis, he is *the* commander. Barak asking Deborah to go with him to fight Sisera—otherwise he will not go (Judg. 4.8)—offers Nunally-Cox the chance to present Barak as 'fainthearted' so that Deborah appears as the strong one, for she 'has to encourage him every step of the way' and she later describes Barak as 'weak-kneed'. To present Deborah as the strong, independent

woman she is constructing, however, she still has to retain gender-specific categories about the ways man and woman should behave, what is 'masculine' and what is 'femine' behaviour. Barak's behaviour is not that of a man—especially not the behaviour of a military commander—because (military) man should not be fainthearted or weak-kneed. Woman is not usually strong, so Deborah's strong role stands out in contrast with the way woman and man are expected to behave.

For Ellis, this part of the story allows her a chance to present her view that woman should be support for man—man should assume the major and responsible public roles. 'His own faith should have been sufficiently strong for him to rely on God's promise but it obviously needed tangible support, as ours all too often does'. She thus interprets his weakness not as physical weakness, or as a man's nerves about fighting, for this would take away his very man-liness (his definition as man) which forms the basis of her whole reading; rather she interprets it as a weakness in faith, to which all can fall prey. Woman—Deborah—is thus put in the role as one who can strengthen that faith, an idea which is reminiscent of nineteenth century ideas about the true woman who is inherently morally superior to a man and can lead him away from the paths of temptation and to the paths of faithfulness. But what woman cannot assume is the role of actor, the role of man. Woman can only exercise power through man.

Deborah's gender, Deborah being a woman in this story, is very important for the arguments of both Nunally-Cox and Ellis (and in a sense this is a repetition of the point that the story of Deborah is an ideo-story). For Nunally-Cox, Deborah being a woman is vital because it offers support for her view that woman can be strong, stand alone and assume positions not usually assigned to her, and therefore it supports the view that gender should not really matter at all. But her interpretation relies on measuring Deborah, as woman, against standards for man: man is usually the who is strong and independent. Ellis argues that this is a story showing that women should remain in the minds of roles so long assigned to them, and that these roles are God-given. 'Let no-one despise the roles allocated to women; although first in the transgression she has been redeemed'. It is worth noting that although she talks of roles allocated to women (in the plural) she moves onto speaking of the monolithic 'she'—'woman' who should behave in the normative ways as prescribed in

scripture. Variations in roles for different, individual women are not considered. This makes her interpretation ethnocentric, for one thing; the normative woman is prescribed according to distinctly western Christian standards, placed inside a western institution—the patriarchal nuclear family.

Ellis writes too: 'scripture portrays for us some women whose faith excelled or complemented that of the men'. It is Barak's lack of faith (needing a bolstering from Deborah and her greater faith) which results in glory and honour going to a woman, the implication being that glory and honour should rightfully go to man, but Barak's weakness, lack of man-liness, made the 'correct' order of things go awry. He stepped out of the prescribed behaviour for man which resulted in a turn of events quite out of the ordinary. Even so, Deborah (and Jael) only received any such honour and glory by exercising power through Barak, through man. Speaking of Deborah, Ellis says, 'this faithful woman became the spur to Barak's faith, enabling him to overthrow Israel's oppressor with God's promise fulfilled'.

The attempts by Ellis and Nunally-Cox to make a consistent pattern—the coherent subject—falter on the way: the subject refuses to be coherent. In the line just cited above, from Ellis, she claims that it is Barak's triumph—and yet it was Jael who actually killed the enemy's leader, Sisera. What sort of triumph is Barak's, then? How much is he really the triumphant military man and therefore the epitome of 'man' she needs for her construction of 'woman' to stand up? Nunally-Cox is arguing that the biblical text supports the liberation of women from their traditional roles, and thus she is in some way arguing that gender does not or should not really matter. To do this, she relies on gender-specific categories, portraying Barak as the failed man so that she can hold up Deborah as the successful woman. She interprets military as being synonymous with man, and therefore cannot take up the opportunity of portraying Deborah as successful militarily, which would advance her argument and which interpretation the text would allow. She mentions that Deborah is described as 'wife of Lappidoth' but then, wanting to show Deborah as a strong, independent figure, describes her as 'one of the few women not defined by her husband'. She ignores, or is unaware of, the alternative translation to 'wife of Lappidoth' which is 'woman of fire'. Ellis, on the other hand, does not mention this description of Deborah as wife of Lappidoth which at first seems odd because she is

arguing for woman's role in marriage and the patriarchal family. But perhaps she deliberately ignores that description because she almost wants to put Barak in the place of husband to Deborah: 'She [a woman who puts her trust in the Lord. . .] will, as Deborah before her, be guide, counsellor and support to her husband, children and the community'. Both Nunally-Cox and Ellis rely chiefly on Judges 4 for their rewriting, though for Nunally-Cox, a greater use of Judges 5 might have given her a very shadowy and possibly less powerful figure in Barak and a more outstanding Deborah. Ellis talks of every man and woman in the Lord working together for the greater glory of God, but working together means working within the gender-specific categories she sets up: woman working for and through man.

These, then, are the kinds of inconsistencies in these rewritings. They indicate that the reader will strive for consistency, but will not necessarily achieve it. Indeed, is not complete consistency unattainable? Jacques Derrida and other deconstructionists maintain that language is slippery, always promising a consistency or coherency which will never occur because there is no center. And yet, readers continue to form consistent patterns out of texts, trying to make sense of the material, seeking centers and creating them. Even Derrida says,

I didn't say there was no center, that we could get along without a center. I believe that the center is a function, not a being—reality, but a function. And this function is absolutely indispensable (quoted in Lentricchia 1983: 174).

In these readings of Judges 4 and 5, Nunally-Cox and Ellis are trying to create the coherent subject—'woman'—in itself a created center, and also, they claim, originating from *the* center, God. In a desire to make sense of things, in the search for certainty, we reach for centers, but, says Derrida,

What we do know, what we could know, if it were simply a question of knowing, is that there never has been, and never will be, a unique word, a master name (1973: 159).

There is no master interpretation either, no right interpretation corresponding with 'reality'. This helps to explain why such polarised interpretations as those of Nunally-Cox and Ellis come out of the same text. Susan Wittig develops this question of the text's multivalency in her theory of multiple meanings (1977). She

maintains that the semantic structure of the text is such that it is capable of generating a multiplicity of meanings and creating a variety of significations, and therefore looking for the real meaning in any literary text is bound to end in frustration.

This view would lead simply to a relativist position, where any interpretation is considered valid. But from the social and political position that we are in, this is unsatisfactory. In part this is because I do not consider the relativist position to be attainable or tenable in practice. If we each stand in a particular cultural tradition and society, with a certain set of paradigms and our individual interpretations of those things, as the relativists admit (indeed, claim) that we do, then it means that each one of us is in a particular(ist) position. The relativist is thus in the untenable situation of refusing to place one interpretation above any other, all the while positioned and holding certain assumptions and sets of interpretations. It is not possible to avoid having our own particular or particularist standpoint. Each of us is therefore required to be more self-conscious in our theory and practice: this is, at least, a first step.

However, a political critique of relativism shows that within the power structures of society, certain people (and their texts and interpretations) have had a head start in the market place of ideas, and that the voices of certain groups of the powerful continue to dominate our discourses, silencing others. Therefore, a relativist position allows the oppressor to continue to speak alongside the oppressed who are struggling for the opportunity to speak for themselves. Sandra Harding articulates this problem clearly:

the articulation of relativism as an intellectual position emerges historically only as an attempt to dissolve challenges to the legitimacy of purportedly universal beliefs and ways of life. It is an objective problem, or solution of a problem, only from the perspective of the dominating groups. Reality may indeed appear to have many different structures from the perspectives of our different locations in social relations, but some of these appearances are ideologies in the strong sense of the term: they are not only false and 'interested' beliefs but also ones that are used to structure social relations for the rest of us. For subjugated groups, a relativist stance expresses a false consciousness. It accepts the dominant group's insistence that their right to hold distorted views (and of course to make policy for all of us on the basis of those views) is intellectually legitimate (1986: 657).

These are vital considerations when addressing the question of how to adjudicate between interpretations. My analysis has discounted the possibility of adjudicating in terms of how 'true' or 'real' an interpretation is. An alternative is to consider the effects of the interpretation (the reception of the text), and how such interpretations contribute to ideologies which are oppressive. In this case, it is necessary to look at how Nunally-Cox's and Ellis' constructions of 'woman' collude with or shatter existing oppressive ideologies about woman, and therefore what effect they would have once they are part of the discourses that shape us.

This kind of critique is therefore a vital part of literary criticism, and is what makes it a political project. It is necessary, in this project, to uncover all those apparently original or natural or God-given concepts—'woman', the nuclear family, heterosexuality and so on—and show them to be the social constructions that they are. For it is in the name of these things being God-given or original or natural that they are set up as norms, and those who do not fit to them are defined as deviant. Thus people are oppressed every day. Catherine Belsey, in an essay titled: 'Constructing the Subject: deconstructing the text' (1985) points out that in smoothing out contradictions, closing the text, literary criticism has been the accomplice of ideology. By releasing a text's contradictions, and thus making it open to multiple interpretations, she believes that we release the partiality of the ideology inscribed in the text and release it from 'coherent' interpretations which have censored any elements in the text which would come into collision with dominant ideologies.

I would argue, then, that those who have been oppressed and silenced should have voices in interpreting, both in doing this kind of uncovering or deconstructive work and in making their own interpretations. Difficulties still remain though. For we as women do this kind of work in discourses which continue to be male dominated, and therefore women continue to speak in the voice of that dominant discourse, as I have tried to show in this analysis. Ideologies which are prevailing in those discourses about woman's position and nature pervade their interpretations—this is especially noticeable in Ellis' reading. The solution does not lie in simply giving a voice to 'woman', of getting 'woman' to read and speak and write. That is, we cannot have token members of subjugated groups representing the views of the whole group. If this is the case the subjugated group will remain just that—the subjugated group. As I hope this analysis has

shown, individual women do not read in one, monolithic way as 'woman'. The second way of breaking down the notion of 'woman', of destroying the idea that there is something fixed, essential about woman, that all women can be reduced to 'woman', is, then, to get the voices of many, many different, individual women into the many discourses. There will, therefore, be the ideas and experiences and views of different women in the discourses which shape our identities. This will be a vital, ongoing part in ridding ourselves of oppressive notions of woman to which all women are supposed to conform. We, as women, need to enter discourses with many voices and thus begin to affect the prevailing ideologies about woman. There are still difficulties with this—we continue to use language created in discourses dominated by men—but it is at least a very important step. By our very multivocality, we can break down the coherent subject 'woman': by talking as women, we can show that we are not 'woman'.

Appendix 1

Janice Nunally-Cox, *Foremothers, Women of the Bible*, pp. 48-50

The fourth judge is a woman, and a prophet at that. She is Deborah, one of the most remembered of the judges. About this time, the people of Israel are being oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan. Jabin lives in Hazor and has an army commanded by a man named Sisera. Deborah is presently judge in Israel; the scripture pictures her as sitting under a palm in the hill country, with the people coming to her for counsel. She is introduced as a 'prophetess' and 'wife of Lappidoth', but we know nothing of why she has earned the title of prophet, nor do we hear anything of her husband. Perhaps one of the few women not defined by her husband, Deborah stands clearly on her own.

The story opens with Deborah sending a message to Barak, her chief of command. She says that the Lord commands him to gather his troops and meet Sisera, the opposing general. Barak's response is one to remember:

Barak said to her, 'if you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go'. And she said, 'I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman' (Judges 4.8, 9).

Deborah's comment sets the stage for the emergence of another woman, Jael. But Jael's time has not yet come, so off go Deborah and the faint-hearted Barak to meet the foe. Sisera, in the meantime, calls out nine hundred chariots of iron, and all his men. The two forces meet at Mount Tabor, and Deborah has to encourage Barak every step of the way:

'Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand.
Does not the Lord go out before you?' (Judges 4.14a)

Barak takes up the charge with ten thousand men following, and the Canaanites are duly routed from the field. Sisera jumps from his chariot and flees on foot. . .

Following this narrative is what is known as the 'Song of Deborah', a long poem which recounts the deeds of Deborah, Barak, and Jael. This happens to be the oldest remaining fragment of Hebrew literature. The song has been composed about Deborah, not by her. Deborah is referred to as 'mother in Israel' and Jael is praised alike. . . The song goes on to describe in detail how Jael brought down Sisera. The song, having exalted both women as national heroines, ends with a summary couplet:

So perish all thine enemies.
O Lord!
But thy friends be like the sun as
he rises in his might (Judg. 5.31).

Deborah and Jael are most certainly honoured friends of Israel, yet we need to mention a few disparate things in connection with them. In the New Testament book of Hebrews, for instance, a strange thing occurs in Chapter 11, the faith chapter previously referred to. The writer rehearses a litany of the faithful from the time of Sarah and Abraham. Isaac, Jacob, Esau, and Moses are mentioned, and also Rahab. Next, several judges are listed: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, then on to David and Samuel. After reading the story of Deborah and Barak, it is a bit surprising to see Barak named among the judges, while Deborah is nowhere mentioned. Here again we have a blatant bias on the part of the writer. Had Barak been in any way an equal to Deborah, there might be grounds for the omission, but it is evident that he was a weak-kneed character needing continual encouragement from the true 'mother in Israel'.

Appendix 2

Ivy, Ellis 'Deborah', *Women of the Bible. A Compilation of Essays by Sisters*, pp. 73-75

'The peasantry ceased in Israel, they ceased until you arose, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel' (Judg. 5.7, RSV).

After the death of Joshua, there followed for the people of Israel a period of disorganisation, tribal discord, and a turning to the worship of gods made from wood and stone. Israel forgot the true God who had delivered them from cruel bondage, succoured them in the wilderness, and brought them to dwell in a pleasant land. They had been commanded to worship no other God and for this disobedience God gave them into the power of their

enemies. But when they cried to the Lord, 'He raised up judges who waved them'. These national heroes were sometimes called 'Deliverers' and of most it is said that they 'judged Israel' for a stated number of years. It is clear that this imparts a new meaning to the word 'judge', namely, that of a leader in battle and a ruler in peace. They were also more than leaders and rulers since they were empowered by God's Holy Spirit for the deliverance and preservation of Israel up to the establishment of the kingdom.

Deborah, a prophetess, appeared about the year 1125 BC. She had her headquarters between Ramah and Bethel, where the people of Israel came to consult her in relation to their tribal differences and family problems. She was thus a judge in the non-military sense of the word and it was probably because of her judicial and prophesying renown that the people had recourse to her in the circumstances to which they were reduced under Jabin's oppression.

Sisera was commander of the armed forces of Jabin, king of Canaan, into whose power God had delivered Israel. Their cruel oppression had lasted twenty years when Deborah was empowered by the Holy Spirit to send for Barak, son of Abinoam, who dwelt some 95 miles to the north of Deborah's encampment, in Kedesh Naphtali.

'Does the Lord command you?'

'The Lord commands you.'

'I will draw out Sisera. . . and I will give him unto your hand.'

This command and promise from the Lord was not sufficient to encourage Barak, with the men of Israel, to move against Sisera, without the presence of Deborah. 'If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.'

Did Barak feel Deborah to be the vital link between himself and God? His own faith should have been sufficiently strong for him to rely on God's promise, but it obviously needed tangible support, as ours all too often does. Deborah, agreeing to accompany him into battle, warned Barak that his weakness of faith would result in the glory and honour going to a woman.

Song of Triumph

The battle took place in the plain of Jezreel, Deborah telling Barak when to launch the offensive, the day when the Lord would give Sisera and his armies into the power of the Israelites. Sisera, admitting defeat, left his chariots and horses, fleeing on foot. . .

In Deborah's song of triumph we see a word picture of the lives of the people of Israel under the oppression of Jabin. 'Caravans ceased' to travel, those who moved about the country 'kept to the byways', the people of the villages moved into towns for greater protection, 'until you arose, Deborah, arose as a Mother in Israel'. This faithful woman became a spur to Barak's faith, enabling him to overthrow Israel's oppressors, with God's promise

fulfilled. 'And the land had rest for forty years.' Although Deborah's strength was the support for Barak's weakness, it is Barak's name which is included in the list of faithful men and women in Hebrews 11. 'And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak. . . ' But what greater accolade could Deborah receive than to be known for all time as 'a mother in Israel?'

Many women today clamour for the so called liberation of their sex. The wise woman will realise that she has a great deal of power to control present and future events. The mother has the training of the child during its most formative years, and the wife can help sustain and guide her husband. Did not God form Eve as a helpmeet? A woman who trusts in the Lord does not rely on her own understanding, but always acknowledges God in her daily life and allows Him to guide her way. She will, as Deborah before her, be guide, counsellor and support to husband, children and the community in which she lives, always ready with a helping hand and kind word, a support to those weak in faith, a Mother in Spiritual Israel.

Let no one despise the role allocated to women; although first in the transgression, she has been redeemed. Scripture portrays for us some women whose faith excelled or complemented that of the men. In these last days may every man and woman in the Lord work together for the greater glory of God; for this will be their united task in the coming Kingdom and if we work not together now, we shall not then. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

Notes

1. See the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza on this, and her development of a feminist biblical hermeneutics for the New Testament (1983, 1984).

2. My discussion here is informed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's development of a hermeneutics of suspicion (1983, 1984).

3. This way of talking about 'woman' and 'man' was suggested to me by Alice Jardine in a seminar discussion, February 1987.

4. Actually this genre goes back at least to the *The Woman's Bible* by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and such books have continued to be written through this century, for example, Edith Deen's *All the Women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row) was published in 1955; but there has been a particularly large number of such books written in the 1970s and 1980s.

5. This term was developed by Mieke Bal in seminars and discussions at the Harvard Divinity School, spring 1986.

III

COMMEMORATING THE DEAD: SACRIFICED WOMEN AND READINGS OF REVENGE

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TAMAR AND THE LIMITS OF PATRIARCHY:
BETWEEN RAPE AND SEDUCTION
(2 Samuel 13 and Genesis 38)

Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes

The Image of Women as Victims

And Amnon began to hate her with a very great hate. Indeed the hate with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her.

Sometimes the proverbial 'post coitum' melancholy changes to hate. Food for moralists.

The story of Amon and Tamar is still used occasionally to preach chastity before marriage, as is apparent from this quotation from a popular youth preacher:

At a given moment you meet a boy or a girl. It is all still very immature and childish. But instead of letting it grow into the most beautiful thing in the world, you take it there and then. And in the end everything turns out much worse, much more unpleasant than you had imagined (Schoch 1959: 86).

I am not presuming this interpretation to be correct. The story seems to be not so much about 'premature' sexual intercourse as about sexual violence. Despite her resistance Tamar is raped by her half-brother Amnon. Rape and sexual violence—often indicated by the blanket term 'incest'—still happen frequently. Feminist analyses have shown that this form of violence is inherent in patriarchal power structures (Brownmiller 1975; Daly 1973; Doomen 1976; Drayer 1983; Schrijvers, 1983; Römkens 1980).

Research into the phenomenon of sexual violence or an analysis of a story on this theme must pay attention to this context. Immediate questions in connection with this are: to what extent can we speak of

legitimization or veiling of the problem? Does the phenomenon of 'blaming the victim' (Daly 1973: 49) arise and is the culprit pardoned? Is the rape a logical consequence of the dominant power structure? In analysing power-relationships we can use the criteria set out by Joke Schrijvers (1983: 58). Extreme repression of women, according to her, exists in circumstances:

- where women have no say about their own sexuality and fertility, but are responsible for the care and nourishment of children and other members of the household.
- where women are economically dependent on men or are exploited in the worst paid and most reviled forms of work.
- where women are isolated from contact with other women, both physically and socially.
- where according to the dominant ways of thinking and in their own estimation women are inferior to men—as regards their work, their bodies and their intellect.

Following on from this last point: when analysing a story about rape, attention must also be paid to the portrayal of the woman/the victim. This, indeed, deserves to be the starting point of the analysis, since it is only from this perspective that the less visible effects of the exertion of power may also come to light.

... It is not sufficient to research the directly perceivable forms or moments of violence. Precisely the lack of open conflicts can be an indication of the importance of the repressed party: she anticipates the possible violence and conforms in advance to the norms set for her. In order to prevent a confrontation in which she will be the loser, she submits according to the rules of those who have more power, or which are prescribed in the dominant ideology which reflects the interests of those in power. Römken rightly takes the invisible aspects which tend to be neglected, as a central point in her analysis of violence against women:

'Also with reference to violence it seems that the most subtle form of power-assertion and violence manifests itself invisibly in the forming of feelings and thoughts—in this case: fear and the anticipation of possible violence—which ensure compliance in advance without a man having to do anything himself' (Schrijvers 1983: 56).

Feminist research has pointed out how important it is to ask ourselves what is the effect of stories. This is especially important as

regards the self-image of women. It applies even more strongly to stories in which sexual violence plays a role. Römken, to whom reference has already been made, indicates that:

The presence of a centuries-old and almost universal image of women as victims which is supported and propagated by culture-ideology, forms a source of women's impotence to resist violence (Römken 1980: 290).

Is the story of Amnon and Tamar another contribution to that universal image of woman as the victim? Does the story itself contain the beginnings of an attempt to break through this? Or is a correction of that image to be found elsewhere? I suspect that the latter is the case. There is, namely, another story in the Bible, in which a woman who bears the name Tamar plays a central role. This Tamar, too, is in the first instance a mere victim of the patriarchal power wielded over her by her father-in-law, Judah.

By exploiting the other limit which the patriarchy sets for women, namely the ability to seduce, she is able to reverse the situation. She seduces Judah and by this changes her object-position to that of the subject. Perhaps this Tamar story can be conceived as a 'Midrash', a commentary in narrative form on 2 Samuel 13: as a rehabilitation of the Tamar who is condemned to the limit of patriarchy where women are completely powerless—(as victims of) rape. From the analysis of both stories it should be possible to ascertain the extent to which this hypothesis can be verified. Before I go on to do this, however, I must offer an initial argument to show that my suggestion is not without reason. The book of Genesis as well as the books of Samuel were most probably composed during the Jewish exile in Babylon ($\pm$ 6th century BC). The books of Samuel are an example of Israel's prophetic history-writing. In Genesis Israel gives a character-sketch of itself. Sometimes this is in the form of idealized images (namely in the parts about Abraham), often in the form of extremely critical self-portraits (namely the sons of Jacob). Judah is presented as the dynastic father of David. The question is, therefore, whether Judah reveals traits reminiscent of David. Similarly we can ask whether Judah's daughter-in-law Tamar may possibly refer to Tamar, the daughter of David.

Amnon and Tamar

The way in which a text is constructed is often indicative of the

central point of the content. The story of Amnon and Tamar is built on a ring-composition (Fokkelman 1982: 100) which, reproduced schematically, looks like this:

- A Amnon in love with Tamar (1-2)
- B Intervention of Jonadab (3-5)
[David as a go-between (6-7)]
- C Tamar's arrival (8-9a)
- D Amnon sends his servants away (9b)
- E Amnon orders Tamar to come and lie with him.
Tamar attempts in vain to resist (11-14a)
- X Amnon rapes Tamar and the love turns to hate (14b-15a)
- E' Amnon orders Tamar to leave. Tamar attempts in vain to resist (15b-16)
- D' Amnon calls his servant back (17)
- C' Tamar leaves (18-19)
- B' Intervention of Absalom (20)
[Reaction of David (21)]
- A' Absalom hates Amnon (22)

The love of the beginning has at the end given place to hate. The core of the story thus probably lies in the reversal of love to hate (vv. 14b-15a). The only break in the symmetrical structure is formed by the appearances of David, the central figure of the previous chapters. This could be an indication of the ambiguous position which he holds in the story (Fokkelman 1982: 100).

A

1

And it came to pass after this:

Absalom the son of David had a beautiful sister,
her name was Tamar.

And Amnon, the son of David, fell in love with her.

So distressed was Amnon that he made himself ill
on account of Tamar, his sister,

for a virgin was she

and it was impossible in the eyes of Amnon to do anything to her.

The words with which the story begins refer to the previous chapters; David's adultery with Bathsheba, his murder of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband and the judgment of the prophet (2 Sam. 12.9-12). The history of sexual and other violence continues. The first name mentioned is that of Absalom, the main character of the following section (2 Sam. 13-20). In this story he is only present in

the background. He and Tamar are children of Maächa, a princess (2 Sam. 3.3). Amnon is the son of Ahinoam and the firstborn of David (2 Sam. 3.2).

The action with which Amnon opens the story is his falling in love with Tamar. Immediately an obstacle appears: Tamar is a virgin. That means forbidden territory for other men, except the man to whom she is given by her father (or brother?) as a wife. That is certainly not Amnon's intention, however, as is clear from the statement that it was impossible in his eyes 'to do anything to her'. His second action, being so distressed that he made himself ill, thus lacks romantic overtones.

Tamar, in contrast to her brothers, is not spoken of as the daughter of David. She is the beautiful sister of Absalom, and thus the half-sister of Amnon. The latter fact appears not to prevent a relationship with Amnon. Only her virginity is put forward here as an impediment. This passage, in which she steps forward independently—for she was a virgin—at the same time indicates how illusory this independence is. So long as she is not yet the possession of a husband she is the (unblemished) property of her father/eldest brother. The responsibility for her remaining unblemished lies with David and Absalom.

B

3 And Amnon had a companion,
his name was Jonadab, son of Shimea, brother of David.
And Jonadab was a very wise man

4 and he said to him:

Why are you so miserable, son of the king, from morning
to morning?

Will you not tell me?

And Amnon said to him:

Tamar, the sister of Absalom, my brother, I love.

5 And Jonadab said to him:

Go and lie on your bed and act ill.

When your father comes to see you,

then say to him:

Let Tamar, my sister come and let her feed me with
healing bread

and let her make the healing food before my eyes
so that I see it and eat from her hand.

Another member of the family, Jonadab, who is called 'very wise', makes his entrance. He asks what the reader already knows and then

plans a strategy for Amnon. He must change his illness, which is an expression of his impotence, into a means of power, by feigning illness. The Hebrew verb used here and in v. 2 means literally: to make oneself ill. Depending on the context it can also be translated with 'become ill' or 'pretend to be ill'. The majority of translators/commentators seem to choose 'to the point of illness', thus assuming that Amnon in v. 2 really is ill. I, along with Jonadab, have my doubts about this. That the verb takes a shift in meaning when Jonadab uses it is clear.

Tamar, the object of desire, is called 'sister of Absalom' by Amnon. By this he indicates that it is not her virginity itself, but the fact that this virgin is under the protection of Absalom 'my brother' which is the real obstacle to 'doing anything to her'. The only person who can remove this obstacle is David, as Jonadab correctly perceives.

6 And Amnon lay down and acted ill.

And the king came to see him.

And Amnon said to the king:

Let Tamar, my sister, come

and let her bake before my eyes two *lebiba* cakes/libido cakes,

so that I may eat the healing food from her hand.

and David sent to Tamar, to her house, saying:

Go to the house of Amnon, your brother,

and make healing food for him.

Everything goes as Jonadab, the *helper*, suggested. David, the *destinateur*, introduced as 'the king', unwittingly complies with Amnon's request. At least that is the conclusion one would draw from reading the usual translation. The obvious difference is where in the Hebrew there is talk of 'healing food' and '*lebiba* cakes'. This has been neutralized to 'food' and 'cakes'. By no means an innocent form of cover-up. In '*lebiba* cakes' is the word *leb*, which means 'heart'. That the Hebrew text—*ṭ'labbeḇ ḥibbot*—is ambiguous seems certain. It could be translated by 'heart cakes'. Another possibility, 'libido cakes', was suggested by Jonneke Bekkenkamp. This translation captures the sound of the Hebrew word and the nature of Amnon's love for Tamar.

Amnon makes a slip of the tongue. In his request to David he alters the healing food which Jonadab spoke of, into *lebiba* cakes. He implicitly lets his father, who has been through all this himself, know his real intention. Might he even be asking permission? Without

comment David complies with Amnon's request. He orders Tamar to provide 'healing food' for Amnon. In doing so he might have known he was delivering her into the hands of his son, her rapist.

C

- 8 And Tamar went to the house of Amnon, her brother,
 And he lay there.
 and she took the dough and kneeded
 and before his eyes she baked and prepared the lebibka cakes
 9 and she took the pan
 and she shook (them out) in his sight.
 And he refused to eat.

Thanks to the cooperation of the three men—her father, her cousin and her half-brother—Tamar, whose opinion is not asked for, goes to Amnon's house. She carries out the actions, which are described in great detail, as would be expected of a woman in a patriarchal society. 'Before the eyes' and 'in the sight' of Amnon. Amnon's first active deed in this story is a refusal. Lebibka cakes should be eaten by two people in privacy. The snoopers have to go.

D

- 9 And Amnon said:
 Go out every man from me.
 And all men went out from him.

E

- 10 And Amnon said to Tamar:
 Bring me the healing food in the (dark interior) room,
 that I may eat the healing food from your hand.
 And Tamar took the lebibka cakes which she had made
 and brought them to Amnon, her brother, in the room.
 11 And she gave them to him to eat.
 And he seized hold of her and said to her:
 Come, lie with me my sister.
 12 And she said to him:
 No my brother
 don't humiliate me
 for it is not done like this in Israel.
 Do not do this shameful foolishness
 13 And I, where shall I carry my shame?
 And you, you would be like one of the shameful fools in
 Israel.
 Now, speak to the king
 for he will not refuse me from you.
 14 And he did not want to listen to her voice.

From v. 9 Amnon never ceases to make demands. At first he maintains the pretence towards Tamar, that he only needs her attention as a nurse. The undoubtedly sexual connotation of the expression used here for the third time 'to eat out of her/your hand' is veiled by this. His second command to Tamar is no longer ambiguous. His passivity changes to impetuous activity, a change which is illuminated by the shift in meaning of the word 'to lie'. From passive resting it is transformed to mean violation. The resistance of Tamar, who until now has followed the instructions of David and Amnon without comment, is impressive and revealing. The 'lie with me' of Amnon means 'rape' to her, according to the law of the land it is a 'shameful foolishness' (see also Gen. 34.7). She points out the consequences for herself and for Amnon and makes an alternative suggestion to him. This makes Amnon's refusal even worse. But even more than that, we see poignantly the extent to which Tamar is forced to comply with the wishes of the patriarchal order. Her own wishes are totally subordinated to it.

X

14b And he was stronger than she
and raped her.

15a And Amnon began to hate her with a very great hate.
Indeed, the hate with which he hated her was greater than the
love
with which he had loved her.

The quick sequence of verbs used to describe the rape-scene shows on the one hand 'how Amnon is conditioned merely to reach orgasm' (Fokkelman 1982: 107), on the other hand it shows how the object-function of Tamar has been followed by its most extreme conclusion. When the object has fulfilled its function, it becomes an object of hate. This is an undisguised example of the mechanism of 'blaming the victim'. Eyes, which are only capable of seeing the other as an object and desiring it, cannot bear the eyes of the other. They would then have to see the naked truth about themselves.

E'

15b And Amnon said to her:
Get up, go away.

16 And she said to him:
No my brother,
for greater is this evil than the other that you have done
to me:

sending me away.
and he did not want to listen to her.

The radical change in Amnon's feelings is reflected in his command, which is the exact opposite of that in v. 11. Only the addition 'my sister' is missing. Tamar's protest is again revealing. To send her away is a greater evil because it means lifelong scorn. The hate of one man will become collective hate. A deflowered virgin is a blot on the patriarchal order.

Amnon's refusal to listen implies a new act of violence.

D'

17 And he called his young man who served him
and he said:
Send this one away, away from me, onto the street
and bolt the door behind her.

C'

18 And upon her was a long robe with sleeves,
for so were dressed the virgin daughters of the king from
old.
And his servant put her outside, onto the street
and bolted the door behind her.
19 And Tamar took ashes on her head
and the long robe with sleeves that was upon her, she tore
and she put her hand upon her head
and she went, she went away, and she wailed.

The description of Tamar's gown, symbol of her royal dignity, contrasts with the way in which she is treated and with the expression 'this one' in Amnon's last words. Similarly, Tamar's again minutely described actions form a sharp contrast with her activities in vv. 8 and 9. Just as her previous actions were in the service of the 'sick' Amnon's life, they now give expression to the sorrow of her own death. Her wailing can also be interpreted as a cry for justice.

B'

And her brother, Absalom said to her:
Amnon, your brother, has he been with you?
Now my sister, be silent.
Your brother is he.
Do not take to your heart this deed.
And Tamar remained an outcast, in the house of Absalom, her
brother.

I should like to question the generally accepted view that Absalom's words should be seen as comfort. According to Conroy (1978: 68), this is the only text in which the imperative 'Be silent' has the function of consolation. Fokkelman indicates that Absalom's words, which are of course also meant as consolation, indicate primarily that he wants to take the law in his own hands (see also Trible 1984: 51). He does not want Tamar to undertake legal steps. In the light of the continuation of the story—in the next section he murders Amnon—this interpretation seems correct. I think it is also clear, however, that the process of concealment is being reactivated. This is why the victim is made to be silent. Her wailing disturbs the patriarchal/fratriarchal order. The Hebrew word used to describe Tamar's fate means: abandoned, alone, despised.

21 And the king, David, heard all these deeds,
and it inflamed him greatly/he became furious.

David's anger is equally misplaced, for it has no effect, just like his position within the structure of the story. He chose not to know what Amnon's intention was with Tamar; now he chooses to abandon Tamar to her fate.

A'
22 And Absalom did not speak to Amnon, neither good nor evil,
for Absalom hated Amnon on account of the deed that he
had humiliated
Tamar, his sister.

The story begins and ends with Absalom, who remains silent for the moment. That the love with which the story began has definitely been transformed to hate, is clear from the statement that Absalom hated Amnon. This introduces the sequel to the story: Tamar is named once more as the cause of a feud between men. . .

Just as the structure of the text contains the clues for the interpretation of the content, so the victim reveals the mechanisms of repression with which the patriarchal system maintains itself. Because this story is so revealing on both counts, I am of the opinion that it cannot be considered purely as a contribution to the 'universal picture of women as victims'. The portrayal of Tamar is undoubtedly that of a victim. In any case, she fulfils the first three criteria named by Joke Schrijvers. We can deduce from the story that she has no say in the matter of her own sexuality, that she is economically dependent, and that she is isolated as far as contacts with other

women are concerned. As for the fourth criterion: the dominant way of thinking about women, and her own self-image, the picture becomes more complex. The dominant ways of thinking about women can be deduced on the one hand from the behaviour of the men. Tamar is treated by them as a pawn in their chess game. On the other hand, Tamar's own behaviour is significant; she complies as a matter of course with the wishes of her father and her brothers. Even in her resistance she makes herself subservient to Amnon's desires (v. 13b). Yet in her resistance she also appears to be extremely strong. Determined to save her honour, she unmasks the true meaning of Amnon's action and reveals his true form: as one of the 'shameful fools' in Israel.

The power which emanates from her words, and the way in which she expresses her grief is certainly not a testimony to a negative self-image. Even in her role as a victim she reveals her dignity. This is not, however, a 'source of power'. She in no way succeeds in breaking through the power-structures. She can only unmask them.

The function of unmasking, which Tamar has in the story, enables the reader to see through the veiled language and actions of those who are in power. All the male characters, from Jonadab to Absalom, contribute to this. The rape is a logical consequence of the current power-relationships: of the united cooperation of Jonadab, David and Amnon. Absalom forces his sister to be silent. The phenomenon of 'blaming the victim', as we have seen, forms the core of the story after all. The mechanism which lies at the root of this phenomenon—namely the refusal to be confronted with the victim and thus with oneself, and, consequently, the projection of the self-hatred onto the woman—is clearly implied. The effect of this upon the understanding reader is thus reversed. The rapist is guilty. In the reception of the text, so far as I can ascertain, this has never been disputed. However, in the sermon quoted at the beginning of this article, Tamar is presented as sharing the guilt. Jonadab and David are almost unanimously considered innocent. Indeed the reader is inclined 'to feel quite sympathetic towards Absalom' (Conroy 1978: 24). For a woman reader, admittedly, this is less self-evident. The exegetical pardon commonly meted out to David and Jonadab teaches us that the process of concealment continues. By declaring that only Amnon, the rapist, is the guilty party, other men can wash their hands in innocence. In this way rape remains a mere surface blemish on the patriarchal order. Thus its legitimization, or, at least, 'understanding', is only one step further.

Judah and Tamar

This story too is constructed as a ring-composition:

- A Birth of the sons of Judah (1-5)
- B Death of Er and Onan (6-10)
- C Judah sends Tamar away (11)
- D Tamar removes her widow's clothing and covers herself in a veil (12-14)
- X Negotiations between Judah and Tamar (15-18)
- D' Tamar removes her veil puts and her widow's clothing back on (19)
- C' Judah sends Hira to Tamar (20-23)
- B' Death sentence for Tamar (24-26)
- A' Birth of the sons of Tamar (27-30)

The analysis must show whether the negotiations between Judah and Tamar do indeed form the core of the story.

- A
- 1 And it came to pass at that time:
Judah went down, away from his brothers
and he turned away to a man from Adullam, his name was Hira.
 - 2 And Judah saw there a daughter of a Canaanite man, his name was Sua,
and he took her
and he went into her
 - 3 and she received
and she bore a son
and he called his name: Er.
 - 4 And she received again
and she bore a son
and she called his name: Onan.
 - 5 And she continued again
and she bore a son
and she called his name: Shela.
— and he was in Kesiv while she was giving birth to him.

As the first words of the text reveal, this story about Judah and Tamar forms a side-track. The story of Joseph, who in Genesis 37 is sold as a slave on the initiative of Judah and who is seduced by his master's wife in Genesis 39, is interrupted. Careful study of the text shows, however, that we are here dealing with a carefully thought out departure. I shall return to this.

In this section Judah's actions correspond to those expected of a dynastic father. He 'sees', 'takes' and 'goes into' a—nameless—woman, who ensures his line of descent. That we may expect more side-tracks is evident from the fact that he stays in Keziv (city of lies) while his last son is born.

B

6 And Judah took a wife for Er, his firstborn, her name was Tamar.

7 And it came to pass:

Er, the firstborn of Judah was evil in the eyes of JHWH
and JHWH let him die.

8 And Judah said to Onan:

Go to the wife of your brother
and consume the brother-in-law-marriage with her
and make the seed of your brother rise.

9 And Onan knew

that the seed would not be his.

And it came to pass:

when he went into the wife of his brother
that he spoiled on the earth in order not to give seed to his
brother.

10 And it was evil in the eyes of JHWH what he did
and he let him die too.

The execution of Judah's aim, the ensuring of descendants for his sons is thwarted twice by the intervention of the power above. This constitutes a surprising variation in the common theme (in Genesis) of infertility. The cause of it in this case is not, however, infertility of the woman. The fact that Er and Onan are 'evil in the eyes of YHWH' means that Tamar cannot make her contribution to the continuation of history.

Er, the eldest son, dies before he is able to take the position of subject in the narrative. He is helpless, as Joseph is in Genesis 37, and neither does his name help him. If you reverse 'Er' you get 'evil' in Hebrew. Tamar is not yet pregnant—perhaps the marriage has not yet been consummated?—and she is given to the second son. Information about the marriage to a brother-in-law can be found in Deut. 25.5-10. There two motives are given: (a) the name of the dead husband must not be extinguished, (b) his property must not pass into strange hands. Onan, the 'potent' or the 'blinded', comes off better as far as the narrative goes. He is spoken to, he has a vision and he acts. What he focalizes, however, is his second-class position

and the nature of his eventual action derived from this. Hence, his action consists of a refusal. Just like Joseph in Genesis 39 he refuses sex with the woman allotted to him. Should the 'evil' which causes the death of both sons be interpreted as fear of sexuality?

C

- 11 And Judah said to Tamar, his daughter-in-law:
 Sit as a widow in the house of your father
 until my son Shela is grown up.
 For he said (to himself):
 So that he shall not die too, like his brothers.
 And Tamar went
 And she sat in the house of her father.

As is evident from his words, Judah sees Tamar as the cause of the death of his sons. To prevent the death of his younger son, as a result of contact with Tamar, he sends her away. As far as she is concerned, however, he makes it seem as though it is a temporary measure. By sending Tamar away Judah makes the achieving of his goal impossible. Or rather, he now has two goals: to ensure the line of descent of his eldest son and the safety of his youngest son. The two goals are mutually exclusive unless Judah ensures the descendants himself. . .

D

- 12 And the days were many
 and the daughter of Sua died, the wife of Judah.
 And Judah consoled himself/was comforted,
 and he went up to the shearers of his flocks,
 he and Hira, his friend the Adullamite, to Timna.
 13 And Tamar was told, saying:
 Behold, your father-in-law is going to Timna to shear his
 flocks.
 14 And she took off her clothes of widowhood
 and she covered herself with a veil
 and she disguised herself
 and she sat down at the 'opening of the eyes'
 on the way to Timna,
 for she had seen
 that Shela was grown up
 and she, she had not been given to him as a wife.

In contrast to his father, Judah succeeds in protecting his son against contact with a 'dangerous' woman. Jacob's refusal to be

comforted after the report of his son's death (Gen. 37.34) contrasts sharply with Judah's attitude after the death of his sons and his wife. Going to 'shear the flocks' has a sexual connotation.

Tamar, from whom the position of narrative subject has been so far withheld, comes into action on the basis of her analysis of the situation. To prevent herself from being doomed to stay a childless widow, and therefore without rights, she oversteps the command of her father-in-law, hence, the limits set by the patriarchy. She can only do this by disguising herself.

- 15 And Judah saw her
and took her to be a prostitute
for she had hidden her face.
- 16 And he turned to her on the way
and he said:
Come, let me go into you
for he did not know
that she was his daughter-in-law.
And she said:
What will you give me for going into me?
- 17 And he said:
I shall send you a kid-goat from the flock.
And she said
If you give me a pledge until you send it.
- 18 And he said:
What pledge shall I give you?
And she said:
Your seal, your cords and your staff that is in your hand.
And he gave (them) to her
and he went into her
and she conceived from him.

Judah embarks on another side-track. Despite the fact that Tamar sits by the 'opening of the eyes' (and according to the rabbis that is the entrance to the resting place of our father Abraham) Judah's vision appears somewhat clouded. In the first place he does not see Tamar. In the second place, he sees a prostitute where he should have seen a sacred woman. In the ancient Near East, and thus in Canaan, women had the right to make love to a stranger or a priest. This was seen as a sacrifice to the Goddess of love, Astarte. The woman who made love in this way, and who veiled herself to this end, was called a 'sacred one' in the sense of 'unblemished' woman. In Israel this practice was strictly discouraged (Balz-Cochois 1902^a and 1982^b).

Seeing the so-called prostitute also brings on a noticeable change in Judah's behaviour; for the first time he speaks in a non-commanding way. Prostitutes do not let themselves be 'taken' just like that. They determine the price and thereby attack the self-evident patriarchal power. Judah's desire makes him dependent on Tamar. She is the subject of the speech, the action and the focalization in this scene. In contrast to Judah she is acting on a correct analysis of the situation. She makes sure that Judah *gives* something. Only when he has yielded the signs of his masculine dignity and thereby given himself up to Tamar, can we speak of a fruitful communication. Despite himself and without knowing it, Judah has now achieved both his aims: descendants for his eldest son and protection of his youngest son.

Tamar's performance thus brings about a number of fundamental changes. She reverses her position of powerlessness to one of power. She forces Judah to alter his behaviour. And she puts history, which Judah and his sons have stopped, back into motion.

D'

- 19 And she stood up
and she went away
and she took off her veil
and she put on the clothes of her widowhood.

Now that Tamar has achieved her goal she resumes her appointed place. The power-relationships remain, however, unchanged for the moment.

C'

- 20 And Judah sent the kid-goat by the hand of his friend, the
Adullamite
to take the pledge from the hand of the woman
and he found her not.

- 21 And he asked the men of her place, saying:

Where is the sacred woman, the one by the eyes on the
road?

And they said:

There has been no sacred woman here.

- 22 And he returned to Judah
and he said:

I have not found her

and also the men of the place said:

There has been no sacred woman here.

23 And Judah said:

Let her keep it for herself
lest we become (object of) contempt
Behold, I have sent this goat
and you, you have not found her.

First disguised, now vanished, Tamar still controls the situation. If it was simple to send her away, it is now difficult to find her. The friend saddled with the task of sorting out this mess—all men in it together, isn't it?—and who rightly seeks a sacred woman, cannot get rid of his kid-goat. 'The Torah laughs at men' is *Midrash Rabbah's* comment on this scene (1977: 795). Judah, who in the previous chapter deceived his father using a kid-goat, is now himself caught with his pants down. This is revealed again by his faulty vision on the affair: 'lest *we* (*sic*) become the object of contempt'.

B'

24 And it came to pass (after) about three months:

Judah was told this:

Tamar, your daughter-in-law has prostituted herself.
Yeah, behold, she has conceived from prostitution.

And Judah said:

Take her out
and she will be burned.

25 She, having been brought out, sent for her father-in-law,
saying:

By the man who owns these things I have conceived.

And she said:

Investigate who owns this seal, these cords and this staff.

26 And Judah investigated

and he said:

She is more righteous than I
Why did I not give her to Shela, my son?

And he did not continue to know (to have intercourse with) her
again.

The report of Tamar's prostitution offers Judah the chance to fall back into his old role. Once again he abuses his power and orders that the woman who is guilty of his own misdeed be put to death. This time the death of his sons might be caused not by intervention from above, but by his own action. Again it is Tamar who brings about the reversal of Judah's attitude. By her request 'Investigate. . .' (see also Gen. 37.32) she forces him to open his eyes and see himself

and his fault. The result of this 'eye-opener' is that Judah at last realizes Tamar's true worth and discovers her in her true form. Above all, he sees that he was wrong in protecting his son against her. Over-cautious fathers impede their sons. By reserving the role of subject for themselves, they kill their own family and impede the progress of history.

A'

27 And it came to pass in the time of her giving birth:

Behold, twins in her belly.

28 And it came to pass at her giving birth:

One gave a hand

and the midwife took (it)

and bound around his hand scarlet, saying:

This one came out first.

29 And it came to pass, his hand was withdrawn,:

Behold, his brother came out.

And she said:

What a breach are you breaking over you.

And his name was called: Perez

30 And after that came out his brother, around whose hand was scarlet,

and his name was called: Zerach.

The birth of the twins, which closes the ring of the story, makes up for the death of Er and Onan. Tamar, and, thanks to her, Judah too, has achieved her goal through thick and thin. Her role is now, however, complete. The boundaries of patriarchy have not been permanently broken down. It is the sons who continue the story.

This story, too, is revealing if we read it from Tamar's viewpoint. Her position, just like that of the other Tamar, is one of complete dependence, both sexually and economically. She has no support from other women. And from the way in which Judah treats her we can deduce the existence of a predominantly negative ideology about women. Her action is, however, witness to a positive self-image. Determined to stand up for her rights and recognition, she sets out a well-considered strategy for achieving her goals. Her analysis of the situation is correct. In v. 14 she sees the injustice that has been done to her. From her action in vv. 16 and 17 we see that she knows she cannot trust Judah. In v. 26 she forces Judah to see the truth. Her action shows what tricks the oppressed have to play, in danger of their lives, in order to receive justice within the given framework.

They cannot permit themselves the luxury of staying within the moral code of the ruling class. Their strategies serve rather to unmask the dual repressive character of that morality.

The way in which Tamar brings about Judah's insight leads the reader to see through his behaviour. On the basis of an incorrect analysis of the situation he behaves as a repressor and sends Tamar away. This action forces Judah to abandon his goal, and, as a result, he lets himself be led astray by new short-term goals: the compliance with the prostitute, the regaining of the symbols of his dignity, and the command to burn Tamar. If he had done the latter, he would have destroyed his own line of descent. On the other hand his misuse of power leads to his vision of reality becoming seriously distorted. Thanks to the revealing action of his victim he returns to reality.

The evaluation of Tamar's role in the story has not been unanimously positive.

The cunning way in which Tamar sets about her task deserves no approval. She stays alive, she bears children, but from now on Judah avoids all contact with her, let alone giving her to Shela in marriage (Böhl and van Veldhuizen 1925: 104).

The ignorance of Judah (v. 16) is seen as some kind of excuse. He is touched by 'durchaus keine Schuld' (TWAT 1980: 583). The vision of Tamar is veiled in these exegeses. Women who seduce are evidently still dangerous. Men are still innocent. The story which follows that of Judah and Tamar in which Joseph is nearly seduced too, points again in that direction, and contains the same judgment.

Tamar, a Midrash on Tamar?

There are other stories in Genesis which point more directly to the story of Amnon and Tamar than Genesis 38. The rape of Dinah in Genesis 34 even seems to be a repetition of it. Dinah is raped by Shechem, the son of a land-owner. Her father is silent but her brothers take cruel revenge because of this 'shameful foolishness in Israel'. They annihilate the whole town in which Shechem lives. There is one glaring alteration: the rape does not lead to hate. Shechem falls in love with Dinah, he 'spoke to her heart' and wants to marry her. Her brothers' pride is too wounded, however, to allow this. The meaning of this structural change is only a shift in the portrayal of the men. The rapist is presented as more sympathetic, the brothers more bloodthirsty. The victim does not need to be

silenced here. She never opens her mouth during the whole story. The revival of Tamar in the figure of Dinah thus only leads to a confirmation and a sustaining of the image of the victim.

In Genesis 37 the 'long robe with sleeves' of Joseph points to Tamar. For Joseph too, this robe is a symbol of his dignity, namely as the favorite son of Jacob (v. 3). It offers him just as little protection, however. His brothers strip him of it (v. 23) and send it, bloodied, to their father (v. 32). Tamar's story is again repeated in Joseph's. In Genesis 39 it continues. The scene in which Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph—who is beautiful of body and face—is reminiscent, sometimes to the letter, of the scene between Amnon and Tamar. Potiphar's wife loses. Joseph appears unscathed from the struggle. The contact with this woman even proves to be the source of his later position of power. In the figure of Joseph, Tamar appears to be restored to honour. The sex-change she has to undergo for this makes this restoration of honour rather dubious, though. It is further confirmation and a strengthening of the patriarchal order.

In Genesis 38, apart from the name Tamar and the fact that Judah is the dynastic father of David, there are no literal indications of the other Tamar story. Names, however, are not unimportant in the Bible. Moreover, as we have seen, Genesis 38 is closely, albeit unusually related to the surrounding chapters. An investigation of similarities or significant differences would seem to be justified.

As for David and Judah:

- Both lose their two older sons: Amnon and later Absalom; Er and Onan.
- The son born of an (originally) illicit relationship makes history: Solomon, the son of Bathsheba; Perez, of whom David is born.
- Both David and Judah send their daughter (-in-law) away on a basis of an incorrect analysis of the situation. David in order to satisfy his son; Judah in order to protect his son from sexual contact.
- The way in which they both focalize is distorted. David chooses to interpret 'lebiba cakes' as 'healing food'; Judah does not know the difference between a prostitute and a sacred woman.
- Both are happy to be side-tracked: David with Bathsheba; Judah with Tamar.
- According to the old rabbinical exegesis, Hirah, Judah's

friend, is identified as king Hiram, named in 1 Kings 5, who 'had always loved David' (*Midrash Rabbah* 1977: 791).

Amnon and Judah (who is a lover as well as a father) are similar in their violent reaction which they show after their misdeed: Amnon hates Tamar and throws her out on the street; Judah wants to have his daughter-in-law burned. In contrast to Amnon and to David, Judah is prepared to listen to his victim and to face the confrontation with himself.

Both Tamars have the function of focalizer in their respective stories. Their vision and their strong action reveal the true face of their oppressors. In one this leads to success, in the other it does not. That the second Tamar does succeed where the other gets the worst of it, is due to the fact that she disguises herself. She fights the patriarchal power structure, which exists thanks to concealment, using its own weapons. She disarms Judah and brings about a reversal of his attitude. The disgrace, to which the other Tamar is condemned, lands, thanks to her, equally on the head of her father-in-law. He becomes an object of ridicule/contempt, which, incidentally, is also true of David following his adultery with Bathsheba. The second Tamar is not dependent upon the reading public for recognition of her just cause. She is given it in the text. *Mirabile dictu* this has not always worked in her favour. Maybe defenseless victims do after all more strongly appeal to the (whose?) imagination.

The most significant contrast between the two stories is in the attitude towards sexuality. Merciless self-satisfaction against abstinence. The all-too-unwitting father seems to be corrected by the over-cautious father. A correction which can hardly be called an improvement. Both attitudes stem from the inability to relate to a woman. In the second story this (male) problem is solved. The power structure is altered, from which a fruitful communication can develop. That the second Tamar story can be read as a midrash on the first seems likely. Like in a trick-mirror the characters appear in new forms. The father is finally brought to insight. Justice is done to the victim. In passing, the relativity of Israel's holy aversion to pagan practices is shown. The eldest son dies before he can do any evil. The story of Tamar, the victim, does not repeat itself a third time. The stage now shifts to the other limit of patriarchy: at the side-track, by the 'opening of the eyes'.

*Appendix**Father goes out on the town*

Splendid idea, that, of Hira's, to have a trip out. I'm not cut out for the grieving widower role, and, well after all, time heals all wounds as they say. Perhaps the sheepshearing will give me a chance to chat up some woolly little baa-lamb. I'll have to get rid of my old pal first, though.

Well isn't that a coincidence! Surely that's Abraham's grave on the left. What an excellent excuse. And who knows who I might meet on the way. Great, it worked, Fine, father, off you trot to your grandfather's grave. I don't know if you'll ever be a grandfather the way you're going on. . . Now what's that I see? Something a good upright Israelite should walk straight past. But who is going to now? And a qedesha like that's just a common or garden whore anyway. Let see if it works. Stupid of me not to have brought anything. Mind you . . ., this kind of woman will probably do it for free. A religious duty they call it. Ha, ha, it's all right for these Canaanites, isn't it.

Hm, disappointing. My nice suit doesn't seem to be making much of an impression. I'll send her something. Hira will understand, I'm sure. Hmm, kinky, a veil like that. I wonder what is under it. A nice bit of stuff by the sound of it. She's asking a lot. Seems like she doesn't trust me. Well, what the hell, you only live once. Good thing Shela's safe at home. He should see this. You look great as a father, caught with your trousers down. You can forget about the rest of his upbringing. Just look at David. Dreadful how he fed that lamb to the lion. Poor old Tamar. No, you'd be better taking the lion in the dark a few times and. . . Tamar?!? . . .

AN IDEOLOGY OF EXPENDABILITY:
 VIRGIN DAUGHTER SACRIFICE IN
 GENESIS 19.1-11, JUDGES 11.30-39 AND 19.22-26

Anne Michele Tapp

Introduction

It is obvious, even to the reader unfamiliar with narratology, that a narrative text comes to life through events and actors. What is less obvious, however, is that the organization of and relationship between events creates not only the fabula through which a story is told, but also functions to propagate an implicit or explicit ideology.¹ This ideology suggests to the reader that particular events, according to their relationship with other events, are valuable, successful or normative. Narratives with a highly ideological intent or function are referred to as 'ideo-stories' and generally operate on two levels: the concrete, in which the events, actors and other components of the fabula are visible; and the ideological, in which the fabula as a whole supports a particular ideology. These two levels continually interact throughout the narrative to create the ideo-story. The task for the student of narratology is to examine the interaction between a fabula's components and the ideologies assumed in that fabula.

Establishing the relationship between an ideology and the story through which it is conveyed can be helpful in gaining insight into the process of reading. In this way, narratology is concerned not only with analyzing the components of an ideo-story but just as importantly with illuminating the text's effect on its receiver. An ideo-story draws its readers towards, or at least exposes them to, a distinct ideology. This suggests that the reception of an ideo-story is neither neutral, nor objective, nor purely esthetic, but is, rather, fundamental to the project of the text itself. It is in the interaction between the reader and the ideo-story that meaning is given to a text.

Without a critical analysis of the story's components, the reader is left unchecked to determine the text's meaning. Likewise, without an awareness of the process of reading, the ideology conveyed through the story is easily misinterpreted as 'reality' itself, rather than simply a particular misrepresentation of it.²

In the following pages I examine the fabulae of Gen. 19.1-11, Judg. 19.22-26 and Judg. 11.30-39. I am concerned both with an analysis of each fabula as an *ideo-story*, and with an awareness of how their ideologies are received by readers. I have chosen these three fabulae because of their similar pattern of events, because of their ability to stand independent of the larger narratives in which they are found, and because each includes either the actual or proposed sacrifice of a virgin daughter. In at least two (and we may come to discover, all three) of the texts addressed, virgin daughter sacrifice is so cursorily mentioned that it tends hardly to be described as an event. The offering of virgin daughters for sacrifice is, in effect, a 'non-event'. By establishing virgin daughter sacrifice as central to the fabula in these narratives, I hope to elucidate both the events and the ideologies which surround them, and to subject these events and ideologies to a critical analysis.

Throughout this paper I speak of 'virgin daughter sacrifice' though in only one text is a virgin daughter actually killed. My intention is not to make each fabula more hideous than it already is, but to suggest that the impetus of sacrifice rests in the actions of the giver, and not necessarily in the receptivity of the receiver. Sacrifice implies a triangular relationship between three discrete actants—the giver, the receiver and the object sacrificed. The giver, by virtue of *his* authority (which includes the authority of a property owner to sacrifice property) and power (which includes but is not limited to physical power), offers 'his' object to the receiver. The object must be valuable enough to entice the receiver and effect some sense of personal forfeiture on the part of the giver. The receiver, who possesses something (tangible or not) that the giver is willing to incur a measure of personal loss in order to attain, is the actant power in this triangular relationship. The dynamics between the sacrifice giver and the object offered in sacrifice remains the same regardless of whether or not the sacrifice is accepted by the receiver. Virgin daughters in each of the fabulae addressed share the status of a sacrificial offering. Each is willingly forfeited by her father, and each is powerless and objectified in her fate.

Finally, my analysis of the Genesis and Judges fabulae is offered as a counter-reading to traditional biblical commentaries. While biblical commentaries can be useful in proposing possible clues to problems within the text, they are not, to the dismay of their authors, presupposition-free. Biblical commentaries reflect what contemporary scholars (most often, male scholars) deem as significant or insignificant; they are, in fact, ideo-texts themselves. The Anchor Bible commentary on Genesis 19, for example, excludes any reference to Lot's suggested sacrifice of his virgin daughters (Speizer 1964). The sole reference to Lot's sacrifice found in The International Critical Commentary not only excuses the sacrifice proposal but venerates Lot's courage in making it: 'Lot's readiness to sacrifice the honor of his daughters... shows him as a courageous champion of the obligations of hospitality in a situation of extreme embarrassment... (Skinner 1930: 307). Neither J. Alberto Soggin nor A. Slotki, two renowned Judges scholars, mentions the proposed sacrifice of the virgin daughter in Judges 19, and both fail to recognize the gender and status of the sacrifice victim in Judges 11 as having any significance whatsoever to the text.³ The tools of narratology together with an awareness of the persuasive impact of ideo-stories allow for an analysis that presents a critical and alternative reading of these texts.

Narratological Analysis

In the following analysis of the events and actants in Gen. 19.1-11, Judg. 11.30-39 and Judg. 19.22-26 I will employ narratological criteria for establishing an event (change, choice and confrontation), as well as its definition and subcategorization of actants. Narratology defines actants as 'a class of actors whose members have an identical relation to the aspects of *telos* which constitutes the principle of the fabula' (Bal 1985: 26). Classes of actants are sub-categorized as actant-subjects and actant-objects, power and receiver, and helper and opponent (Bal. 28-31). The purpose of these subcategories is to assist the textual critic in identifying types of actants involved in the various events of a fabula. Given that ideo-stories operate as narratives—that their ideologies are subsumed in events and actants—narratology concurrently examines the components of the story and accounts for the significance of the ideology.

In this and the two subsequent sections I examine the change,

choice, confrontation and actants in each event. My analysis is somewhat technical at this point. After distinguishing the events and actants found in these fabulae, we will be better able to address their patterns and ideologies later in our analysis.

Genesis 19.1-11

Six consecutive events constitute the fabula of Gen. 19.1-11. The first event includes the arrival of two angels to the city of Sodom and Lot's initial interaction with them.⁴

Event 1. ¹The two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth, ²and said, 'My lords, turn aside, I pray you, to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise up early and go on your way'.

We have in this passage the three necessary criteria for an event: change, choice and confrontation. The arrival of the two angels changes the situation in which we initially find Lot—'sitting at the gate of Sodom'. The criterion of choice arises first when Lot chooses to respond to the angels' presence, and then again when the angels must choose to accept or decline Lot's invitation. Finally, Lot confronts the angels both bodily ('he rose to meet them') and verbally (with his request that they spend the night at his home).

Though three individuals are introduced in this event, there are, in effect, only two actants. The two angels (here and throughout the entire narrative) act and are addressed as a sole entity and thus enact the role of a single actant. In this event, Lot is the actant-subject (acting towards the angels) and the angels are the actant-objects (receiving the actions of Lot).

Event 2. ^{2b}They said, 'No; we will spend the night in the street'.

³But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

The angels' refusal of Lot's invitation heightens the confrontation between the actants. Lot insists further and the angels eventually accept (choose) his invitation. The setting then moves (changes) from the city gate to Lot's home where a feast is prepared and consumed. While Lot remains an actant-subject in this event ('he urged them strongly'), the position of the actant-object shifts slightly.

The angels' initial refusal of Lot's hospitality (which, in this event, acts as the power) establishes them as active actant-recipients; that is, the angels, as actant-receivers, are able to challenge Lot's subject action by denying his hospitality. Thus, while Lot acts and the angels receive, the power-base of the event rests with the angels' ability either to accept. . . or refuse Lot's actions.

Event 3. ⁴But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, ail the people to the last man, surrounded the house; ⁵and they called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them'.

This event introduces us to a new group of actors—the men of Sodom. The presence of the men changes the previously peaceful situation, creates a confrontation between actants, and places Lot in a position to choose between his own safety and that of his guests. In this event, the men of Sodom are the unchallenged actant-subject-opponents, Lot is the actant-object-receiver, and the two angels are the objects of the demand.

Event 4. ⁶Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him ⁷and said, 'I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. ⁸Behold, I have two virgin daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men for they have come under the shelter of my roof'.

Again the situation changes. Lot goes out from his house, shuts the door that separates the men of Sodom from the two visitors (and, we discover, Lot's two virgin daughters), and confronts his opponents with a compromise. Though Lot is the actant-subject in this event, his power as such is limited. Realizing this, Lot summons the arenas of power available to him. He cites his position as a community member in addressing the townsmen as 'brothers'; he alludes to the social obligation that a host protect house guests (which includes an allusion to the degradation of the host's honor if this obligation is failed); and he evokes his power as a father to offer his virgin daughters as sexual substitutes. Despite Lot's effort to assert the power available to him, the actant-object-receivers (the townsmen) retain their power to reject Lot's compromise.

At this point in the fabula, Lot's two virgin daughters are introduced as objects of a compromise. They, like the two visitors in

the previous event, have no status except that of 'desirable object'. Unlike the angels, however, the virgin daughters are not protected by hospitality codes. We should remember that Lot is as yet unaware of his house guests' identity. It is not until three verses later that the visitors reveal themselves as messengers of the Lord. Thus, Lot's offer cannot be understood as an effort to protect the holy (angels) through the sacrifice of the profane (daughters), but only as the protection of men (with whom Lot has no allegiance except as a host) through the sacrifice of women.

It is often argued that the Sodom narrative is a scriptural admonishment of male homosexuality.⁵ Obviously the townsmen's desire 'to know' Lot's house guests implies more than the hope for a congenial relationship with the men. It is a phrase that means, quite simply, to have sex.⁶ Might we not expect Lot to counter their request with an offer of two 'sexually ripe' women to replace the two desired men? Lot's offer would then appease the men's lust without transgressing sexual norms. This argument ignores one salient fact—an entire city of men waits outside Lot's door. The issue is not merely one of sex, it is more one of violence. As in any rape, and especially gang rape, sex is the vehicle through which violence and hatred are expressed. To emphasize 'sex' more than 'violence' denies the reality of the situation. The victims of the mob are threatened with physical violence (perhaps to the point of death) as well as sexual degradation.

Event 5. ⁹But they said, 'Stand back!' And they said, 'This fellow came to sojourn, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them'. Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door. ¹⁰ But the men put forth their hands and brought Lot into the house to them and shut the door.

The townsmen, dissatisfied with Lot's offer, act against their opponent with force. In this event, power rests entirely in the number of actant-subjects. Lot, as an actant-object, appears doomed until the two angels intercede as actant-helpers. The situation changes rapidly according to the choices of action made by each group of actant-subjects. As in Event 4, the door is recognized as a physical barrier. For Lot and his house guests, it is the barrier separating safety from danger; for the townsmen, it is the barrier separating themselves from the objects they desire.

Event 6. ¹¹And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves groping for the door.

In the final event of the fabula, power shifts from the human realm to that of the divine. Once both groups of opponents are positioned on their respective sides of the door, the angels act upon the townsmen, striking them blind and concluding the fabula with a spectacle of divine power.

Judges 19.22-26

The format and succession of events in *Judg.* 19.22-26 are conspicuously similar to those found in *Gen.* 19.1-11. The portion of the Judges fabula with which we are concerned begins with a nameless 'old man' invites a traveling Levite and his concubine to spend the night in the safety of his home. Whereas the Genesis story gives no mention of an affinity between Lot and the two visitors beyond common hospitality, we are told that the old man and the Levite in *Judges* 19 are both from 'the hill country of Ephraim'. Thus, the hospitality of the old man arises from an assumed affinity between himself and the Ephraimite Levite. The Levite accepts the old man's invitation without hesitation. We begin our analysis with the man feasting in the old man's home. The fabula with which we are concerned consists of the following four events.

Event 1. ²²As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, base fellows, beset the house round about, beating on the door; and they said to the old man, the master of the house, 'Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him'.

The merriment of the old man and his house guest is abruptly interrupted (changed) with the townsmen's (actant-subjects) demand that the Levite be sent out in order that they 'may know him'.⁷ Confrontation occurs between the actant-subjects and the actant-object (the old man) regarding the desired object (the Levite). The old man must choose between further confrontation or acquiescing to the demand of the actant-subjects (whose power, as in the Genesis story, lies in their numbers).

Event 2. ²³And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, 'No, my brethren, do not act so wickedly; seeing

that this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing.

²⁴Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do with them what seems good to you; but against this man do not do so vile a thing'.

Seeking to appease the townsmen, the old man offers a compromise—a virgin and a concubine in lieu of the Levite. Like Lot before him, the old man attempts to establish a power-base for his compromise by alluding to his position as a community member ('my brethren'), the ethic of hospitality ('seeing that this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing'), and his authority as a house master and father to offer his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine as sexual substitutes. The old man's compromise changes the terms of the townsmen's request and presents them with a seemingly attractive sexual alternative.

Event 3. ²⁵But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and put her out to them,

The actant-subjects (the townsmen) refuse the old man's compromise and the tension between actant-subject and actant-object heightens. The Levite desperately asserts the only power available to him—that of master/owner of his concubine. As the object of the confrontation, the Levite's action is predicated on the hope that his opponents will accept his offering.

Event 4. ^{25b}and they knew her, and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. ²⁶And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, till it was light.

The townsmen accept the Levite's offering and the focus of the confrontation shifts from the Levite to his concubine. The townsmen are unchallenged as actant-subjects; the concubine is helpless as an actant-object. She is repeatedly raped and then released at dawn. The event ends with the woman returning to the threshold from which she was cast. We are left uncertain if she is dead or alive.

Judges 11.30-39

Though the circumstances surrounding the fabula in Judg. 11.30-39 differ from those of the previous two narratives, the pattern of events remains similar. In the present fabula, it is to Yahweh rather than a

mob of men that a virgin daughter is sacrificed. The narrative in which this fabula is found opens with the elders of Gilead beseeching Jephthah to lead them in war against the Ammonites. Jephthah accepts his position as commander on the condition that, upon defeating the Ammonites, he be made the leader of Gilead. The portion of the narrative with which we are concerned consists of the following five events.

Event 1. ³⁰And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, 'If thou wilt give the Ammonites into my hands, ³¹then whoever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's and I will offer him up for a burnt offering'.

Jephthah entreats the assistance of Yahweh to insure his victory over the Ammonites (as well as his subsequent position of authority won through that victory). In bargaining with the Lord, Jephthah recognizes that the power of his actions as an actant-subject rest with an actant-object-helper—that is, with Yahweh. In this sense, Jephthah becomes the vehicle (object-receiver) through which Yahweh defeats the Ammonites. Jephthah chooses the temporary position of object-receiver in return for a future position as actant-subject over the people of Gilead.

Event 2. ³²So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them; and the Lord gave them into his hand. ³³And he smote them from Aro'er to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim, with a very great slaughter. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.

Jephthah's vow is accepted. Yahweh (the actant-power) delivers the Ammonites into the hands of Jephthah (the actant-subject-receiver) to be smote, slaughtered and subdued. Through his victorious confrontation with the Ammonites, Jephthah's position changes from that of warrior to that of leader of Gilead.

Event 3. ³⁴Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dance; she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. ³⁵And when he saw her, he rent his clothes, and said, 'Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble for me; for I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow'. ³⁶And she said

to him, 'My father, if you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone forth from your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites'.

Dressed in festive attire,⁸ Jephthah's virgin daughter crosses the threshold of her father's house, thus becoming the sacrificial victim of the victory vow. After being admonished for the 'great trouble' she has caused her father, the virgin daughter chooses to succumb to the terms of Jephthah's vow. Though choice is often the prerogative of actant-subjects, in this event the act of choosing is not a particularly empowering one. The virgin daughter cannot choose as a subject might; that is, she cannot choose to reject her fate. She can only choose in what way she will respond to her position as object-opponent. Jephthah, through his own actions as a subject, forfeits his power to alter the situation. He, in effect, is the object-victim of his own subject action, but not nearly as much an object-victim as is his daughter whose life is sacrificed because of her father's fatal vow.⁹

Event 4. ³⁷And she said to her father, 'let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my companions'. ³⁸And he said, 'Go.' And he sent her away for two months; and she departed, she and her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

The virgin daughter ceases being an object-opponent and becomes an actant-helper. She agrees to abide by the conditions of her father's vow, thus aiding in the fulfillment of that vow. She is rewarded for her cooperation by being granted two months to 'bewail her virginity'. Two levels of power occur in this event. The first is the level of immediate power which allows Jephthah to grant his daughter's wish. The second level of power is inaccessible to both Jephthah and his daughter; it is the power held by the actant-recipient to whom Jephthah owes a sacrifice—Yahweh.

Event 5. ³⁹And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had made.

The choice that the vow be fulfilled is made—both by the virgin daughter who returns and by Jephthah who performs the sacrifice. The vow is fulfilled. The confrontation between Jephthah and his

daughter, and Jephthah and Yahweh is over. And the nameless virgin daughter of the new leader of Gilead is dead.

Comparative Analysis

Having examined each fabula separately, we can now distinguish the events, actants and ideologies shared by the three fabulae. Comparative analyses remain subject to their author's presuppositions. When dealing with ideo-stories, these presuppositions can dictate how the author reads a text. Disturbing ideologies are easily glossed over, or blatantly ignored. Ideologies which confirm an author's presuppositions are presented as facts of life rather than critically analyzed for their significance in a text. To separate the reception of a text from the text itself—which is the assumed position of 'objective' analysis—not only damages the text's integrity but also lies about the process and function of reading. The status of virgin daughters as barterable property, for example, is read casually by a textual critic who would not think to question the objectification and subjugation of women in everyday life. The same text would be read quite differently by a woman who experiences the reality of her secondary status.

In the subsequent sections I examine the structural and thematic relationships between the fabulae of Genesis 19, Judges 19 and Judges 11. My analysis is not presupposition-free, nor is it intended, at long last, to elucidate the 'real meaning' of each fabula. The language and categories I employ allow me to focus on specific themes, and to ask specific questions that have traditionally gone ignored by both biblical and textual critics. I am reminded of Susanne Langer's statement that 'The way a question is asked limits and disposes the ways in which any answer to it—right or wrong—may be given' (1942: 3). The questions that I pose in my analysis reflect my own presuppositions, suspicions and feminist orientation; they do not, however, dismiss the integrity of the fabula addressed, nor do they propose to be the only valid questions to ask. The following analysis will hopefully offer further insight into the methods and meanings of these ideo-stories as they relate to the theme of virgin daughter sacrifice.

Pattern of Events

The definition of a fabula as 'a series of logically and chronologically

related events that are caused or experienced by actors' (Bal: 5) suggests that fabulae can be comparatively analyzed via their 'logically and chronologically related events'—that is, their pattern of events. Having completed an analysis of the particular events and actants comprising each fabula, we can offer the following categories as representative of the pattern of events presented in the three fabulae: confrontation, response and solution. I am concerned not only with revealing that the events in each fabula do indeed conform to this pattern, but more importantly, with raising questions regarding the role and status of women (notably, virgin daughters) portrayed through this pattern.

Confrontation: In each fabula, confrontation between two male parties concerned with either the acquisition or protection of a desired object precludes the offering of virgin daughters for sacrifice. In both Gen. 19.4-5 and Judg. 19.22, confrontation occurs between a group of townsmen and the master of a household. The desired object in both events is a male house guest. The initial confrontation in the Judges 11 fabula occurs between Jephthah and Yahweh; the desired object being Jephthah's victory over the Ammonites.

The form of Jephthah's confrontation with Yahweh differs from those in Genesis 19 and Judges 19. The townsmen, by virtue of their numbers are able to confront their opponent with a demand. Conversely, Jephthah can only confront Yahweh, he cannot *demand* that Yahweh concede to his request. Thus, Jephthah's actant power—that is, his ability to direct an event—is momentary and tenuous. As we shall see, this constraint on Jephthah's power effects the response to his confrontation with Yahweh.

Response: It is in response to confrontations between two male parties that virgin daughters are offered for sacrifice. In both Genesis 19 and Judges 19, the hosts acknowledge their limited power. Resigned to the fact that their situations call for a sacrifice, they suggest a compromise. Both hosts invoke their rights as fathers and masters of a household to barter property. They respond to the townsmen's demand with neither abhorrence nor resistance, but with alternative victims—virgin daughters and, in the case of Judges 19, a concubine. As discussed earlier, the substitution of female victims for male victims is not merely a matter of heterosexuality verses homosexuality. While the threat of the townsmen is sexual, the underlying issue is one of violence. The sexual 'ripeness' of virgins simply enhances the hosts' compromises.

Aware of the tenuousness of his power, Jephthah, in a brilliant act of diplomacy, compromises his own request by presenting it in the form of a vow. In effect, Jephthah enacts the roles of both the townsmen (by confronting the possessor of the object he desires) *and* the hosts (by offering a personal sacrifice that enhances his request without altering its terms).

In each fabula, virgin daughters, as the property of their fathers, are sacrificially offered to protect male honor and status. In Genesis 19 and Judges 19, men are protected both from the dishonor of sexual violation and the loss of status incurred by failing to provide safety for male house guests. In Judges 11, a virgin daughter is sacrificed to protect male honor in war and status as a victorious leader. No protest is heard from the virgin daughters. Likely, they are unaware that they are the objects of sacrificial bargaining.

Solution: The pattern of events in these *ideo-stories* concludes with a solution; that is, with an event or series of events that resolve confrontation and allow the narrative to continue to a new fabula. It is in their respective solutions that each fabula differs most dramatically.

The townsmen in both Genesis 19 and Judges 19 reject the host's compromise; the tension heightens; and the house guests respond with violence. The two angels in Genesis 19 beckon their divine powers to strike the townsmen blind. The situation is resolved, the townsmen are defeated. The Levite in Judges 19, confined to mere human power, invokes his nuptial rights and thrusts his concubine into the encroaching mob. Apparently appeased, the townsmen rape and abuse the woman throughout the night. The Levite is safe, the host's honor is spared, the woman proves to be an adequate sacrifice.

Yahweh, in Judges 11, accepts Jephthah's vow with no dispute. The Ammonites are rendered into Jephthah's hands through the power of Yahweh. Victorious, Jephthah returns home to find his daughter approaching in celebration.

After realizing that she is to become the victim of her father's vow, the virgin daughter requests two months to bewail her virginity. In all of the three *fabulae*, this is the sole instance of a woman speaking. Though powerless to alter her fate, the virgin daughter is able to request a period of time in which to mourn the loss of her potential, her future, and her very life. If she is able to speak, then why, we might wonder, does she not speak in protest. The most obvious

reason is that both Yahweh and her father are responsible for her fate. A protest against her position as a sacrificial offering would be a protest against Yahweh who accepted the terms of Jephthah's vow. Less obvious is the reason that a protesting victim of sacrifice bears a striking resemblance to a protesting victim of murder. To speak anything but passive resignation to her fate would be to expose the brutality of Jephthah's vow and disrupt the auspicious nature of sacrifice.

The pattern of confrontation-response-solution is not an unusual one to find in narratives. Such a pattern allows the narrator systematically to relate the events of a story while maintaining an extraordinary amount of control over the reader's reaction. The reader is urged to identify with a particular actant in the confrontation (normally, the actant through whom the narrative is focalized), and then to support that actant throughout the narrative. In this pattern, atrocious events can be glossed over as unfortunate but necessary for the good of the 'hero' actant. Thus is the case in the Genesis and Judges fabulae. The reader is lured into identifying with an actant whose actions might otherwise be condemned as unethical. The focalization in each fabula makes it unambiguously clear that the protection of male honor takes precedence over the lives of virgin daughters. Women are simply available objects that allow men one way or another, to resolve their conflicts.

Location

In each fabula, a doorway separates safety from danger. Actants located inside the spaces separated from the outside by doorways are threatened by actants located outside. The only actor safely able to transgress the boundary of a doorway is the patriarch of the house. Patriarchs negotiate between the inside and outside worlds, between the home and society, between safety and danger, between life and death. As evident in Genesis 19 and Judges 19, men inside the patriarch's home are protected. It is only women who are offered for sacrifice. Thus, men find safety in each other's homes while women, notably virgin daughters, are safe only insofar as they are allowed to remain inside the patriarch's home.

Implicit in this inside-outside dichotomy is the notion of paternal ownership. Patriarchs of households exchange their virgin daughters (their property) for the protection of male visitors. The object of sacrifice must not only be under the patriarch's reign of authority

(that is, his home), but must also be the property of the patriarch. Virgin daughters fulfill both criteria. As the possessions of their father, virgin daughters are 'sold' from the private to the public sphere. They remain objects in both spheres—stripped of personal identity and valued only insofar as they are acceptable sacrifices.

Conclusion

In this analysis we have proposed that the fabulae of Gen. 19.1-11, Judg. 19.22-26 and 11.30-39 share a similar pattern of events, include similar actants, and make similar use of inside-outside symbolism; that virgin daughters, as the property of their fathers, are sacrificially offered in response to confrontations between male actants; and that virgin daughters are powerless to resist their objectification: they may speak, but only in concession to their fate. Obviously, these three fabulae are not identical. Each has its own place within a larger narrative and each serves a purpose peculiar to its author's agenda. Despite their differences, a distinct ideology is advanced by all three fabulae: virgin daughters are expendable. Even if, in a frenzied state of optimism, we were to suggest that one's sacrificial value might be related to a position of esteem, the fact remains that women are killed to protect male honor. Fathers offer their virgin daughters for sacrifice; virgin daughters do not offer themselves.

Ideo-stories propagate ideologies. If narrated well, these ideologies become so integrated with the narrative that it is impossible to distinguish one from the other without dissecting the text. This is the case in the three fabulae examined here. The women in these stories are nameless. They have no identity apart from being the property of a man. They are silent, or speak only in accord with their proscribed fate. They are passive, resigned and helpless. They are in effect, paradigm victims. The ideologies expressed through these fabulae are both degrading and deadly for women. They suggest that women live only as objects to be bartered, abused and sacrificed by men.

Nearly as atrocious as the ideological presentation of women in these fabulae is the fact that each fabula is so inconspicuously couched in a larger narrative that the hideousness of their events reads as a passing detail. The cursory, non-critical allusions to virgin daughter sacrifices in these narratives serve to legitimate the atrocity. We might wonder had Jephthah's daughter been male would he bear a more noteworthy place in the history of Israel.¹⁰ I believe

the answer is indubitably yes. The only other biblical character who is sacrificed by a patriarch for the good of his people is Jesus—who serves as an interesting contrast to the burnt offering of Jephthah's nameless virgin daughter.

We have yet to address the question why virgin daughters rather than virgin sons, or other male relatives, or even slaves are suitable offerings for sacrifice. Though I have suggested that virgin daughters, as the powerless property of their fathers, are barterable possessions, I believe that a deeper, possibly psycho-cultural reason allows for the sacrifice of virgin daughters. My suspicion is that 'sexually ripe' women who have yet to have their fertility exploited by husbands enact an ambiguous role in patriarchal (that is, paternally-oriented) societies. Virgin daughters are, as understood by men, in a transitory state.¹¹ Though capable of child-bearing (a necessity in maintaining male lineage), they remain possessed by their fathers and desired by other males, thus placing them in a dangerous position between two male forces vying for ownership. Interestingly, the word 'virgin' may derive from a Semitic root which in Arabic means 'sever', 'separate'. The virgin daughter must be severed from her father in order that she fulfill her role as child-bearer for her future husband.¹²

Finally, I conclude this paper with a question that should more often be asked by academicians: 'So what?' This analysis has proven fruitful in that we have discovered a relationship between three gyno-sadistic texts. But what can our findings tell us about life outside the fabulae? We know that a particular ideology regarding the status and expendability of virgin daughters is approbated at least enough to have found its way into three biblical narratives, but we do not know if virgin daughters were actually given in sacrifice. My suspicion is that they were. Events which deviate from social norms (and indeed human sacrifice was just such an event in Jewish antiquity [Boling 1975: 209]) find their justification or condemnation in ideology. If three biblical ideo-stories include non-critical allusions to offering virgin daughters for sacrifice, then I believe we have good reason to assume that virgin daughters were, at some point in Hebrew history, the victims of human sacrifice.

Perhaps even more important than pursuing the historical verity of virgin daughter sacrifice is examining the effects of such an ideo-story on its contemporary audience. To believers, the Bible offers a widely read and devotionally revered collection of ideo-stories that simultaneously explain and transcend history. When an ideo-story is

believed to have its origin in divine inspiration, then that story is received as both historically correct and cosmically significant—a very potent and possibly dangerous combination. Additionally, the sacred status of biblical stories tends to create an illusion of separateness between the text and its reception. As discussed previously, readings are part of *ideo-stories* and cannot be separated from them without distorting the story and defining its ideology as 'Truth'.

I do not believe that a systematic rejection of all gyno-sadistic biblical texts is possible. Such an enterprise simply reverses what androcentric scholarship has often done—replacing uncritical adoption with uncritical rejection. A more profitable venture lies in subjecting biblical *ideo-stories* to narratological analysis which allows us to examine the textual and ideological make-up of narratives, as well as to demystify texts whose purposes were obviously 'man-made'. Additionally, narratological analysis re-establishes the relationship between *ideo-stories* and their receivers, and asserts that, as receivers, we are responsible for our interaction with these texts. In this way, *ideo-stories* like those presented in Genesis 19, Judges 19 and Judges 11 can be read with a critical awareness of their ideological intent and their devastating impact on the lives of women.

Notes

1. Throughout this paper, *fabula* will be defined as 'a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors', (Bal 1985: 5.).

2. I am rejecting theories of reading which emphasize esthetics as inadequate for explaining the integral relationship between an *ideo-story* and its reception. For further elaboration on these theories, see H.R. Jauss, *Toward An Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), and W. Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Also, for an insightful critique of these theories, see J. Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, esp. 47-79 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

3. See J.A. Soggin, *Judges* (London: SCM Press, 1981) and *Joshua and Judges*, ed. A. Cohen (London: Soncino Press, 1950), with a commentary on Judges by A. Slothi.

4. All biblical references are to the RSV edition of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. I have chosen this edition because its academic respectability

and its vast readership make the operational form in which these ideo-stories reach their receivers.

5. See C. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing house, 1985) esp. 300-302; J. Skinner, *Genesis* (The International Critical Comentary; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1930), esp. 306-307; R. Davidson, *Genesis 12-50* (The Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), esp. 72-74; and G. Von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), esp. 217-19.

6. E.g. Westermann, p. 301.

7. As in Gen. 19.5, the phrase 'that we may know him' alludes to sexual relations.

8. The women of Israel traditionally met victorious warriors 'with timbrels and dances' (see Exod. 15.20; 1 Sam. 18.6). This fact challenges the assumptions made by some scholars regarding who or what would likely be the first to exit Jephthah's house (see note 9).

9. It has been argued that, because ancient homes were constructed in such a way as to accommodate livestock, Jephthah could have feasibly expected an animal to be the first to meet him upon his return home. See R.G. Boling, *Judges* (The Anchor Bible, New York: Doubleday, 1975), esp. 208, and illustration #8. This argument, however, is pure conjecture and lessens neither the hideousness nor the stupidity of Jephthah's vow.

10. The word used to describe Jephthah's only daughter—*yahid* or *yehidah* (meaning 'only' or 'beloved')—is the same term Yahweh uses in reference to Isaac when demanding that Abraham sacrifice his son (Gen. 22.2). Isaac, however, by virtue of his position as keeper and transmitter of his father's seed and by his similarity to the patriarch in power, was saved from sacrifice.

11. I find Victor Turner's concept of liminality, as well as Mary Douglas's study of marginal periods particularly interesting as possible explanations for the ambiguous status of virgin daughters in patriarchal societies.

12. For further reading on this topic, see Beth Gerstein's analysis and critique of liminality (next in this volume). Also, I have examined the question of virgins' status in greater detail in a paper titled 'Power, Purity and Availability: An Analysis of the Liminal State of Virginity' (unpublished).

A RITUAL PROCESSED
A LOOK AT JUDGES 11.40

Beth Gerstein

If one were to look at the Bible in order to increase any understanding of biblical women's lives one would, at first glance, be disheartened. Though female characters in the Bible have a variety of roles and demonstrate varying levels of activity their characterizations are substantially less than those of males. In addition, the numbers of primary female characters are few, and often, when women are mentioned, their names are kept out of the text and they are not given a voice, thus their characters are even more obscured. Obscured female characterization, in combination with the knowledge that those women who are depicted in the texts are rarely in positions of leadership and authority, sheds light on the inferior status of women in the Bible. Though the historical time frame of the Bible spans hundreds of years, and the women that are referred to represent a variety of societies, cultures and ages, women are predominantly depicted as less valorous, having fewer interactions with God, and being less auspicious. The reasons for this discrepancy of male and female performance and our lack of current knowledge about women in biblical times are no doubt a function of a number of factors: actual inferior statuses within society; a greater concentration, on the part of the narrator, to men and male-related concerns and activities; and greater concerns on the part of the interpreters (until recently, predominantly male) also with male activity and thought.

However, our getting an understanding of women's lives is not an impossible task altogether. Though we often only have pieces of texts that include accounts of women's behaviors and activities, these are indications that women were active agents at that time. Furthermore, we can find repeated in the texts different accounts of the same

female-related activities (women dancing with timbrels, or going up into the hills, for example). This suggests that women were also performing rituals. It is in our understanding of ritual, then, that we might be able to gain insight into the lives of biblical women. An understanding of ritual necessarily entails an understanding of the agents and tools used in ritual which have been endowed with symbolic meaning. These symbols have many different levels of meaning, and (as I will argue below) are used differently by women and men.

This paper will attempt to explore and understand a particular female experience, and its meaning in the Bible. The text I will use is Judg. 11.29-40 in which the virgin daughter is sacrificed by her father, Jephthah. Because the text does not give the daughter a name, and because I will re-focus the story to make her a primary actor, I am going to name and refer to her as Bat (the Hebrew equivalent of daughter). I chose to look at this particular text because it was so startling to read. The sacrifice of virgin girls is seldom alluded to in the Bible. Bat's behavior, her complicity, was/is a curiosity to me, and it seemed as if there might be more going on in the text than I had at first realized—perhaps there are two stories in the text, that of Jephthah and also that of Bat. I thus came up with many questions: what would make Bat agree to be sacrificed? Why did she go to the mountains? Can women gain more from this text than the fact that virgin daughters were sacrificial victims? My interest in this story led to the present evaluation. I will analyze this text by employing methods from narratology ('the theory of narrative texts', Bal 1985: 3), the discipline of anthropology and certain critiques thereof, and by using my own speculations of what might have been possible aspects of women's rituals at that particular time.

The reason why I choose to use some of the methodological components of anthropology is because they can give shape to human experience by their seeking to understand behaviors, symbols, thoughts and actions within various cultures. As Clifford Geertz states:

To look at the symbolic dimensions of social action—art, religion, ideology, science, law, morality, common sense—is not to turn away from the existential dilemmas of life for some empyrean realm of de-emotionalized forms; it is to plunge into the midst of them. The essential vocation of interpretive anthropology is not to answer our deepest question, but to make available to us answers

that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man (and woman) has said (1973: 30).

In particular, I will focus my attention on rituals because integral to their performance are the classifications and structures of particular cultures, as well as the concepts concerning systems of power and belief. Rituals are a part of human experience; an attempt to understand rituals is an attempt to 'record' what the participants say about their life. I will base my discussion and definition of ritual on the works of Victor Turner. He is, in my mind, one of the few scholars who lucidly explains the different stages of ritual and how they function. He does this in a way that integrates the sundry aspects of significant symbols and experiences of the participants' culture. I find Turner's discussions of liminality, *communitas* and dominant symbols particularly helpful in this respect. I will use some of the tools from narratology to help illuminate the narrative aspects of the text. I will analyze the fabula—the related events experienced and/or caused by the actors; the focalization—the relation between the elements which are seen (through a particular vision) and which are presented in the text; and subject/object—the actor/aim. This should clarify the constitution of the rituals and the questions of who is doing the performing.

For clarification purposes I will organize this paper into four major sections. The first section will deal with problems that I have encountered while researching and thinking through the materials of this paper. These problems concern issues of using gender as a central category of analysis. The second section will sketch out my primary materials. This will include charts of the events as they appear in Judg. 11.29-40; charts of rituals focalized through Jephthah (male) and Bat (female); and an analysis of these charts using Turner's theories of ritual. The third section will present a feminist evaluation of the same text. I call this evaluation feminist because I am putting Bat in the center of the story and standing with her, sharing *her* perspective, in order to analyze the ritual of sacrifice as she might have seen it. This perspective, as will be shown, differs from the story focalized through Jephthah, who is part of the dominant society, and the primary actor of the story. I will make this evaluation by discussing Caroline Walker Bynum's feminist critique of Turner's theories—noting where she finds him helpful, and where not. I will then share my own thoughts about the possible

significance of women's rituals in this text. Lastly, I will consider some of the insights concerning creations and recreations of women's stories, and present my attempt at a recreation of this text.

Many of the problems that I have encountered in the preparation of this paper are the problems that others who are interested in studying women's lives encounter: by and large, history and scholarship take 'male experience' to be normative. This being the case, women, and 'female experience', are then necessarily seen as the other. Many feminists, such as Joan Scott, an historian, understand the working of traditional scholarship that keep women on the margins of historical analysis. Scott uses gender as her category of analysis in order to understand women's roles as part of a total structural system in which both men and women participate. Scott looks at the ways in which sexual differences and gender relate to power dynamics. In so doing, she avoids seeing women's historical involvements in complete isolation from, or in complete integration with that of men's involvement. Scott states that: 'analysis must include women's actions and experiences, ideas and policies which define their rights, and metaphoric and symbolic representations of feminine and masculine' (Scott 1983). This helps to fill those holes in history where women are conveniently absent.

Scott's methodology is a helpful backdrop to this essay since it identifies the central problem, female marginalization, and suggests corrective measures. The particular problems that I have found in doing this research are outgrowths of this central one. Throughout the entire Bible women are constantly marginalized to such a degree that their characterization is hard to discern. Though Scott's corrective approach to history is helpful for our framing certain questions about life during biblical times, it is only so useful as the texts allow the information to be gotten; and unfortunately this information is minimal. This means that we need to speculate and be creative while we attempt to correct our image of life during biblical times so that we paint the lives of both women and men.

Though Turner does look at women's rituals he, too, fails to see the ways gender and power dynamics are integrally bound. Consequently, female experience is subsumed under male normative experience, and the gendered aspects of metaphors and symbols and how they work for women, as well as for men, are lost. Neither of these problems are particularly startling, for these are similar to the

problems many scholars of women's lives encounter—there is simply a lack of knowledge, and only so much we can do to uncover all that has been covered up. However, historians (such as Caroline Walker Bynum) are critiquing traditional methodologies and coming up with suggestions for ways to look at the materials that we *do* have for clues about women's worlds of meaning. My attempt in this essay will be to try to uncover one set of meanings for at least one biblical character—Bat.

I begin this section by charting out the fabula of Judg. 11.29–40, and then by making other charts which will focalize events through both the male and female subject-actors respectively. I will use the terms from narratology already briefly defined in the beginning of this paper (fabula, focalization, subject/object). Though most of this text is focalized through the narrator, I will concern myself only with Jephthah, Bat and God (I will deal with God only briefly) in order to keep to the thesis of this paper. I am using these terms, as defined in *Narratology* (Bal 1985), because they will help to describe the way in which our narrative text is constructed. A narrative text is 'a text in which an agent relates a narrative' (Bal 1985: 5). This is not the same as the story, or the fabula of the text. For instance, people might read the same story, but from different texts (e.g. various versions of a folktale); and the fabula may be relayed in different ways (e.g. in a book, or as a play). Narratology is a guide that will help us to sort out and define the various levels of the text so that we can better understand how, and to what aim the characters act.

Next I will define some key terminology that Victor Turner uses in order to present a Turnerian analysis of this text. This analysis will be focuxed on Jephthah. I need to look at this ritual first, before I look at the ritual from Bat's perspective, because the two are intertwined. The circumstances of the Bat-focalized ritual are determined by Jephthah's actions and decisions to sacrifice her. We will see that the texts of the rituals are the same, though the objects and the fabulas for each actor are not.

Chart A¹—Fabula

Actors

God
Jephthah

Events

God's spirit comes upon Jephthah
travels through lands to get to Ammon

Jephthah	vows that if God will deliver the Ammonites to him then the first creature that comes out of his door upon his return home will be given to God as a sacrificial offering.
Jephthah	attacks the Ammonites
God	delivers Ammon to Jephthah
Jephthah	kills great numbers of the Ammonites in battle
Bat	dances out of the house to meet Jephthah
Jephthah	says Bat has broken his heart and has brought him trouble since he made a vow from which he cannot go back
Bat	says he must keep the vow since God delivered the Ammonites
Bat	requests that she be allowed to 'go down to the mountains' ² with her companions for two months to cry about her virginity
Jephthah	tells her to go
Bat	goes with her companions and cries about her virginity on the mountains for two months
Bat	returns to her father
Jephthah	does to her as he vowed (postscript: she dies never having known a man)
Daughters of Israel	go out to celebrate Bat four days a year

Chart B has two parts. They are based on concepts borrowed from A.J. Greimas (1966). The first part describes the relations between the *actor-subject* and the *object* (the aspired aim, goal). The *function* is the actor's relation to that stated goal or design. The second part of the chart describes the relations between the *powers*. The *power* is that element that allows, or prevents, the intentions of the subjects to be realized. In our case, the *receiver*, the one who desires the goals (*function*) allowed by the *power*, is the same as the *actor-subject*.

Chart B—Subjects/Objects/Powers

<i>Actor-subject</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Object</i>
1. Jephthah	wants help to conquer Ammon from	God
2. Bat	wants permission to mourn	virginity
3. Jephthah	wants to keep	vow with God
<i>Power</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Receiver</i>
1. God	delivers the Ammonites in battle to	Jephthah

- | | | |
|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------|
| 2. Jephthah | allows the mourning of virginity | by Bat |
| 3. Bat | allows self to be sacrificed | by Jephthah |

Charts C and D are the *fabulae* (logically related events) which have been focalized, i.e. viewed from particular perspectives, through Jephthah, and then Bat.

Chart C—Male Focalized Fabula Summary

<i>Actors</i>	<i>Events</i>	<i>Description of action</i>
Jephthah	makes vow with God	human/divine communication
Jephthah	is successful in battle	fighting/war
Bat	goes out to greet father	motion
Jephthah	cries out in distress	woe/reprimand
Bat (& companions)	request to mourn virginity and go to mountains	motion
Jephthah	sacrifices Bat	ritual communication/violence
Daughters of Israel	annually celebrate	ritual pilgrimage/motion

Chart D—Female Focalized Fabula Summary

<i>Actors</i>	<i>Events</i>	<i>Description of action</i>
Bat	dances out of house to greet father	motion outward
Jephthah	bemoans his sorrow	woe/reprimand
Bat (& companions)	request to mourn virginity and go down to the mountains	motion down
Jephthah	sacrifices Bat	ritual communication/violence
Daughters of Israel	annually celebrate	motion away from society/ritual pilgrimage

If we look at the various events on the level of the *fabula* we see that the story is indeed about Jephthah, not Bat. Action and events in the text are directly related to his action and decisions. The male-focalized *fabula* summary is the complete *fabula* outline, whereas the

female-focalized summary is not. Also, though both Jephthah and Bat are active powers, Bat's power is found in her allowing herself to be sacrificed, which ends any future possibilities to exhibit power again. Jephthah's demonstration of power enables him to set into motion communication by God. Most importantly, Jephthah has a name and status, while his daughter does not. The female-focalized fabula summary does elucidate some interesting facts, however. These facts are that women's actions in this story all entail motion away from some place, and they all seem to be part of some ritualized behavior (I am speculating here that Bat's mourning her virginity is a ritualized behavior—see below).

Victor Turner would also say that this text's primary actor is Jephthah, and that the central element of the story is the sacrificial ritual. Turner states that rituals are one form of social drama that exists within human societies. Rituals are constituted by three stages: detachment, liminality, reintegration.

The first stage is where an individual or group comes into crisis with the stable set of structures of the culture. This entails some behavior in which the actor-subject in some way signifies detachment from an earlier fixed condition. This occurs in our fabula when the spirit of God comes upon Jephthah. Jephthah's condition had been that of a warrior, so his engaging in battle against the Ammonites in itself is not unique. His reception of the spirit of God, though, which leads him to make his vow—a verbal pact with God—sets him apart from the community and enhances his previous status. The second stage is called the liminal period. In this stage the actor-subject crosses the boundaries of his/her previous status, but has not yet been reintegrated back into society. This is seen as an ambiguous and even dangerous stage since the actor-subject is between statuses, s/he is neither here nor there. Thus, this phase is characterized by antistructure, it is outside the cultural norms and structures of profane, everyday life. Turner says that the attributes of liminality are

necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or step through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. . . . Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon (1969: 95).

Turner would say that Jephthah entered a liminal phase when he performed the actual sacrifice of his daughter. In the act of sacrifice the actor-subject, i.e. the sacrificer (the one who performs the sacrifice) is in sacred time and space; s/he has set into motion communication and connection with the holy (Hubert and Mauss 1898: especially p. 98). In Jephthah's fulfillment of his sacrificial vow he experiences a direct encounter with God; he is sacrificing something of his own and giving it directly to God. In this case a 'likeness to death', as was just mentioned in the above quote, is certainly an appropriate description. Death is the central feature in this sacrifice; though the liminoid actor-subject himself has not died the sacrificial victim, the signifier ('the sensorily perceptible vehicle or outward form which carries a meaning', Turner and Turner 1978: 245), represents and carries the intended meaning for the sacrificer.

The particular ritual Jephthah performed is characterized by a term Turner calls 'ritual of status elevation', that is, the liminoid person is elevated to a higher position with an institution. This is most often characterized by the actor being humbled, and having his/her status reversed while performing the ritual (1969: 167). In order for Jephthah to become endowed with additional power to deal with his new position (that of judge and leader in Israel) he is humbled and stripped of his existing status. This is done by the killing of his daughter; as she is his only daughter, her death changes his status by stripping him of his fatherhood. As Turner states, liminality implies 'that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low' (1969: 97). Jephthah becomes reintegrated into society, and his status becomes elevated by his becoming a judge. In order for Jephthah to become a leader and a judge, a publicly symbolic manifestation of fatherhood (in the patriarchal sense), he must experience a reversal. This reversal is seen as a result of the sacrifice—he has become not-a-father. The sequence of this elevation goes as follows: Jephthah is a father; he sacrifices his daughter and is no longer a father; he publicly takes on a father/patriarch role by becoming a judge.

This reintegration process back into society is characteristic of the third stage of the ritual passage. By now the journey has been completed, Jephthah's status has been elevated through his interaction with God and he returns to secular life. Not only is Jephthah part of the institutionalized structure as a judge, but the sacrificial ritual itself becomes institutionalized within the society as a cause for annual celebration by the daughters of Israel.

Turner would not deny that simultaneous women's rituals also take place within this text, but I do not think he would have analyzed them on their own, rather he would have kept them within the whole structure of the fabula. Turner would have said that Jephthah's status of father of his household is the dominant structure, and Bat's journey to the mountains characterizes anti-structure—a breach of structure. If we go phase by phase through the ritual we would have a chart that looks like this:

Stages	Events	Characteristics
1.	Bat learns of vow	crisis within structure
2.	Bat and companions go to hills to mourn virginity	limin, anti-structure
3.	Bat is ritually sacrificed by her father	reintegration of structure

Bat's liminal phase is liminal to Jephthah, that is, she removes herself from the structure that her father has established and then is literally reintegrated by her being sacrificed and being part of the communication with God and Jephthah, and symbolically reintegrated when the yearly celebration of her sacrifice is performed. The fact that Bat went to the mountains with her companions would indicate that she experienced feelings of *communitas*. *Communitas* is part of the antistructure that combines characters of homogeneity, comradeship, sacredness, and lowliness. It is a relation of the unmediated communication between individuals, during liminal phrases, in which one acutely realizes the essential union one has with humans. Turner states:

Communitas breaks through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or 'holy' possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency (1969: 128).

This feeling of *communitas* (awareness of antistructure) provokes an acute awareness of structure. Bat and her companions go as a group to the mountains; there is no hierarchy or leadership described. The return from the mountains and the ritual is annually simulated. This, then, becomes a calendrical rite, a rite performed at delineated points of time on a yearly basis.

There is a problem here, though, in this Turnerian model of women's ritual. Bat's excursion to the mountains is a ritualized action. I will define ritual here using Turner's own words: a 'formal behavior prescribed for occasions not given over to technological routine that have reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers' (1978: 243). Bat's desire to mourn her virginity does not appear to be routinized behavior (why would she make this request at this time, if it was?). A referent to God has already been established when she acknowledges Jephthah's pact with God; thus the condition for this act being a ritual is established. As will be shown in the following section, this ritual can be seen as a pilgrimage and a rite of passage. The problem is that Turner explains both of these types of ritual as entailing status reversal. There is nothing in this text, however, that would indicate Bat's status being reversed. A status reversal would mean, by Turnerian standards, that Bat's status, since already inferior, would inflate during the ritual. Status inflation is not characteristic of Turner's descriptions of either *communitas* or pilgrimage. Even if pilgrimage is not an appropriate typing for this ritual, Bat dies and her status ceases to exist, and is never elevated. Turner's theories assume a symmetry of experience for men and women that does not fit for women's experiences when we look at them in and of themselves, and not as referents to male activity.

Caroline Walker Bynum's article, 'Women's Stories, Women's Symbols' (1984), addresses the above stated problem with Turner's theories. Bynum illustrates how Turner's assumptions—that what is true for men's rituals is also true for women's rituals—are not always correct. She uses her research on medieval European women to justify her claims. Bynum writes:

Women's stories insofar as they can be discerned behind the tales told by male biographers are in fact less processual than men's; they don't have turning points. And when women recount their own lives, the themes are less climax, conversion, reintegration and triumph, the liminality of reversal or elevation, than continuity. Moreover, women's images and symbols—which according to Turner's model, should reflect either inversion (for example, poverty) insofar as women are superior (for example, from the aristocracy) or elevation (for example, maleness, military prowess) insofar as women *qua* women are inferior—do not quite do either. They rather continue or enhance in image. . . what the women's ordinary experience is, so that one either has to see the woman's

religious stance as permanently liminal or as never quite becoming so' (1984: 108).

Bynum also points out that reversal of status, *communitas*, and liminality all assume that the actor-subjects are full participants within the social structure. However, women are often seen as permanently marginal members of society. They are never in the structure enough to break through it. Bynum suggests that structures and hierarchies are not as important an issue for women because they exist outside the dominant structure. Bynum asserts that medieval European women's stories and symbols are a continuity and enhancement of who they are, and help women in becoming more fully themselves. Women, then, are not liminal to women, but rather to men.

These findings about medieval women's religious piety are based on manuscripts, stories and diaries written by both men and women. As mentioned earlier in this paper, we know no more about Bat and her companions than what we have in Judg. 11.29-40. However, we can speculate as to what women's ritual experience may have been like using a Turnerian approach to ritual, while keeping in mind Bynum's critique.

As already alluded to in a previous section, Bat's excursion to the mountains appears to be a strongly ritualized activity. The Hebrew says that Bat wants to go and cry about her virginity, which I take to mean that she will cry about dying a virgin.³ Is it not possible that this act was not Bat's own innovation, but rather that it was a ritual repeatedly performed by all women when they were about to lose their virginity?⁴ The most obvious way a woman loses her virginity is by having sexual intercourse (in that time, usually with a man and at the time of marriage). However, another way to lose one's virginity is by death, since in death one loses all status—one ceases to be. Bat's dying a virgin puts an end to her virginity. The ritual of mourning one's own virginity could have been a ritual performed by women; it may have been one of the few outlets for women to express, as a group, characteristics that are uniquely theirs: womanhood, sexuality, and the ability to conceive and bear children. Women's mourning and the loss of their virginity could also be their mourning an end to their asexual girlhood status. There is an innocence that exists in childhood while girls and boys are both dependent on their parents that is often missed as one grows older. Though Bat technically was the property of her father, she did not belong to a husband, which

seems to make her as a virgin in-between statuses: girlhood (associated with the father) and marriage (associated with the husband). It is significant that Bat at least has a role in this text (though no name), while her mother is not even mentioned. Her power comes from the fact that she had the potential to bear children and to fulfill the responsibilities of a wife, but she did not. If Bat had married, her status would have changed and been different. As it was, her status was still altered by her death.

A description of Bat and her companions as having experienced feelings of *communitas* are not completely out of place in my analysis. Certain elements of Turner's *communitas* are still important features. As mentioned, the women go out in a group, as companions. There is no mention of a leader, and concepts of hierarchy seem not to be of importance. It is possible that all the women shared the same status while in the mountains. It might also be, however, that in general the women of Gilead, as a group, never saw themselves as being part of a hierarchical structure. Perhaps the structures of the male dominated society were such that when women were able to congregate on their own, in groups, and form their own circles, hierarchy played no role. In any case, the ritual of mourning virginity does seem to be an affirmation and reinforcement of their womanhood. The loss of virginity also entails (except for Bat) a potential pregnancy, a uniquely female-related characteristic.

These ideas are further supported by the mention of the annual celebration of Bat at the end of this text. I chose to use the literal translation of *l'tanot* (to celebrate) since that would be keeping more true to the text, and because I believe that each word was used for a reason.⁵ It is possible that the 'daughters of Israel' see Bat as a heroine. Bat exhibited strength in allowing herself to be sacrificed. Perhaps she was allowed a union with God in her being a sacrificial victim that traditionally was not allowed women. Though she dies, and in that loses her virginity and her status, her independence was not suspended due to a marriage with a man, rather it was by her commitment to God and the structures of her society. A celebration of Bat's heroic qualities could have become institutionalized as a means of celebrating women's ability to wield their own power over their own lives.

Another indication that Bat and her companions were not reversing their status, rather enhancing their identity as women, is seen in Chart D, the female-focalized fabula summary. In this chart

we find that women are *not* liminal to other women; and that their rituals involve spatial elements with regard to the social structure. It also appears that women's encounters with religious life are sought out by means of doing what is characteristically female in their society. Women's religious life is thus a continuation, on a symbolic level, of familiar life experiences. It seems as though every event initiated by women entails movement out of, or in some direction. The three Hebrew verbs used to describe these movements are *yôṣē*—to go out from (when Bat goes out from the house to greet her father); *yarad*—to go down (to describe the excursion to the mountains); and *laeket*—to go, walk (when daughters of Israel celebrate the sacrifice of Bat). Movement away from structured society (and away from consistent acts of violence and aggression) is a predominant characteristic in this text. This action pervades the text to such a degree that movements away from structure, and outside into the wilderness, begin to seem like a normal activity for women. Perhaps, then, their ordinary activities of going out to collect kindling for fire, or getting water, for instance, become ritualized and represented in a continuum of ritual experience.

Aside from all the above speculation about women's rituals, there are a number of hints on the level of the fabula and literal translation of the text that suggest that the significance of the events in the fabula are different for men than for women. For instance, as soon as Jephthah sees his daughter he cries out and accuses her of breaking her heart. He bemoans his pain since he feels as though he cannot break his vow.⁶ Bat, however, calms him and accepts her fate (albeit with a condition). Perhaps she sees her death as a permanent union with God, whereas he sees it initially only as the loss of his daughter. Also, Bat uses the verb '*yarad*', to go down (to the mountains). Where could she have been standing, though, that would provoke the need to 'go down' to the mountains? This is a somewhat strange reference to space! If we don't take this literally, but instead view spatial relations as being an influence on a character's mood (Bal 1985: 97), then this verb might not be so out of place. It could be that the verb *yarad*⁷ is a referent to Bat's shift of positions, i.e. from her being within the group structure as a daughter (inferior status), to a statuslessness while on the mountain with her companions, preceding her death. 'To go down' might indicate that she sees herself as being high up or above something, which could be symbolic of her power and sexual independence as a virgin and her command of the fateful

situation her father presents her with.⁸ A look at Bat's strength in dealing with her own death, whatever it may symbolize, makes one realize that perhaps the narrator uses 'permanently liminalized' women for his own critique of men's activity depicted within the fabula. Even though Bat is sacrificed, this ritual could in Bat's eyes mean some kind of connection with God. It could also mean her actions would become exemplary and ritualized by other women.

My hopes in writing this paper were to look at women's rituals in Judg. 11.29-40 and see what they might say about women's lives. The problems that impeded my doing so were related to issues of gender. My using gender as a category of analysis has helped me to see how gender politics play a supreme role in all aspects of human endeavor, be they scholarship, thought, action, behavior, or existence. My questions that maintain concerns of women as being crucial help me to demarcate and underscore where certain disciplines and ideologies fall short of being relevant for women's lives, but also where they are helpful. This perspective helps me to see how certain ideologies, such as male dominance, are received and perpetuated throughout various aspects of life. I, like Bynum, do not want to throw Victor Turner's theories away because they address women's lives less well than they do those of men. Nor, for the same reason, do I want to throw away our text. Both should be kept for they contain useful information. The Bible, besides being a cultural artifact, shows us the ways texts have obscured women's lives and have asserted men's lives and behavior as normative. Turner provides us with tools to look at the characters in these texts and perhaps to be more complete Turnerians, as he would have been himself had he paid closer attention to his own theories of human experience.

This paper touches on a few points that are useful for feminist scholarship in particular, and to those who seek to ask questions and are open to different ideas. Though we will never fully uncover and understand women in Judg. 11.29-40, we can catch glimpses of certain aspects of life that had meaning for them: virginity, group activity, movement into wilderness within a group. We also see where women had struggled. Such was the case for Bat, who lost her life, but perhaps died with an increased sense of spirituality, an enhanced awareness of what it meant to be a woman; and who preceded a ritual that would perpetuated women's performances of them in groups. According to one biblical scholar, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, we need to recognize both these struggles

—the losses and the victories—in order to claim any part of this history as our own. Another way to reclaim that history lies within a creative actualization of texts. Schüssler Fiorenza writes:

Creative actualization seeks to retell biblical stories from a feminist perspective, to reformulate biblical visions and injunctions. . . to create narrative amplifications of the feminist remnants that have survived in patriarchal texts. In this process of creative re-vision it utilizes all available means of artistic imagination—literary creativity, music and dance (1984: 21).

In our starting creatively to participate in biblical texts we can begin to form an interpretive paradigm that claims as its center ourselves, as women.

Appendix

(Batya has just come in from collecting water and kindling for the fire)

Mother Your father should be home any day now. News of the battle sounded promising. We must be sure to have enough food prepared for his homecoming feast.

Batya Well, I'm not looking forward to his return!

Mother (*surprised*) And why is that?!

Batya Because the news is that he will have me marry the man who proves most valorous as a chief in battle. I don't want to be married, mother; it doesn't look like any fun at all! Look at you, always waiting on father—this whole household revolves around him. I know that is the way things are, and this will happen, eventually, to me, but I don't want to have to serve a man any more than I serve my own father. That's enough! I want to be able to run out to the fields with my girlfriends, to have fun; I want to feel *you* embrace me when I'm sick or in pain. No! I don't want to be subject to some man's fancies and commands. It's enough having to listen to father. I can make my own decisions!

Mother (*Smiles, then reaches for her daughter and embraces her*).

Well, it's not quite as bad as all that. You know, I *do* have some fun sometimes. That's because I am a woman now, and since you have not quite reached that stage you don't know of some of the pleasures women have. And sometimes, when we meet and go out together. . . wonderful things happen. You know that

soon you will join women for your first time in these gatherings right before you marry and must sleep with your husband.

Batya Yes, well, no—I've only heard rumors about it from my girlfriends. We don't know what happens, but we were told that we will be 'going out' soon. What does that mean?

Mother Much of that remains for you to tell me afterwards. This is something for you to feel and experience on your own. But I can tell you that at this time you will know what it means to be a woman, for you will feel it strongly for the first time. It is a feeling so powerful that it never leaves you, even when you go to collect fruits or fetch water. You not only feel your own strength as a woman, but that of your companions as well. In a group you are all women, no more, no less, only women—in its most complete sense of the word. And somehow, when you come back and must quickly marry, your life has a slightly different meaning. You don't just go out to collect firewood, you're not just a servant to your husband. . .

Batya Mother, will you be there? Will you go out too? I want to go but not if you. . .

(At this moment they both raise their heads to the sound of people in the yard. Batya sees her father, but is now overjoyed at his return and at the prospect of 'going out' to mourn her virginity. She runs out of the house, dancing to greet him).

Father Oh daughter, what grief you have caused me!! I made a vow, but I . . I can't. . . I must keep my vow. . . with God.

Batya *(thinks to herself 'he is always reprimanding me!'* Then she steps short, only just beginning to realize that this vow with God is the sacrificial one, entailing her as the victim. But, still being overwhelmed with thoughts of wanting to experience the women's rites, though knowing what her fate will be, she says slowly. . .)
Do what you must do, father, for God helped you to win your battle. Only let me go out for two months, with my companions that I may still become a woman, even if I shall be so only in death. As a sacrifice I will be in union with God, and in that union I will be a complete woman, no more, no less. I will know what a woman is, both physically and spiritually.

Father *(Jephthah's face is blank, his head bent. He replies weakly. . .)*
Go.

Notes

1. The text I am using is *The New English Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

2. The verb in Hebrew is *yarad*, which literally means 'go down'. This twist of motion will be discussed further on in the essay.

3. It is interesting to note that many of the commentaries that I consulted assumed that Bat cried about her virginity because she was upset about dying childless. This obscures the option that she might have cried because her death would mean that she would not be able to be sexual, and thus would not take on the status of a sexual woman. I chose the commentaries listed below because they seem to provide a representative sampling of the popular views about this story: Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (Anchor Bible; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975); Clifton J. Allen, ed., *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970); *Seventh Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Washington: Review and Herald Publ. Assoc., 1954).

4. In fact, mourning one's loss of virginity is a common theme within a whole genre of poetry, epithalamia (marriage poems). These poems go at least as far back as the poetry of Sappho. It is worthwhile to quote her poetry here since it really helps to build the argument for this ritual activity. Sappho writes:

poem 32	Bridesmaids' carol II
first voice	Virginity O my virginity! Where will you go when I lose you?
second voice	I'm off to a place I shall never come back from Dear Bride! I shall never come back to you Never!
poem 36	Why am I crying? Am I still sad because of my lost maidenhood?

(*Sappho*, transl. Mary Barnard; Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1958). I am indebted to Carol Christ and Celeste Schenck (Bunting Institute colloquium series, March 11, 1987, "Corinna Sings": Women Poets and the Politics of Genre') for pointing out this information.

5. I quote from Holladay's Lexicon: '*tanot*, Judges 11.40 sing, celebrate in song, but suggested for Judges 11.40 lament', *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1971). This is the only place throughout the entire bible where this word is translated this way.

6. In *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (*op. cit.*), the commentator makes the reader feel more sorry for Jephthah than for his daughter.

7. Holladay's Lexicon indicates the verb *yarad* generally means 'go down', except in Judg. 11.37 where it means to go up!

8. An example of a virgin daughter who takes command over her own sacrifice is seen in Iphigenia, where she allows herself to be sacrificed (the sacrifice being the product of her father's pact with the gods) for the benefit of all of Greece.

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PSEUDO-PHILO AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

Cynthia Baker

A comparative analysis of the story of Jephthah's daughter in Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*¹ and its prototype in Judges reveals that Pseudo-Philo's agenda is much more than the transmission or embellishment of tradition.² Pseudo-Philo has reworked a biblical story about a bargain between the Lord and a warrior, wherein child sacrifice is the price of victory, so that the story becomes a tale of two people carrying out their divinely ordained destinies within their own separate spheres. The child victim of Judges becomes an independent and noble heroine. Jephthah ceases to be the sole protagonist while the Lord is absolved of his implicit consent to Jephthah's bargain. The ways in which these transformations are accomplished, as well as the motivations underlying them, are the subject of this study.

The paper is composed of three parts. In the first, I shall examine the interaction between the various characters in the two accounts. The second part focuses on Seila's Lament. Here, the dynamic set in motion in the first several verses of Pseudo-Philo's story reaches full lyrical expression. Finally, in the third part, I shall look at the question of translation and interpretation as it bears on the findings of parts 1 and 2.

Interaction and Introspection

A close reading of Pseudo-Philo's account of 'Jephthah's Daughter' leads one to realize that the author has created a distance between

the characters which does not exist in the biblical account. This effect is achieved, within the constraints of the *fabula*,³ by the use of such devices as indirect speech, rhetorical questions, and the omission of direct and indirect objects of verbs of speech and action. This obscuring of character interaction occurs consistently throughout the story and accomplishes a number of effects. First, the author thereby dissipates the horror and perplexity evoked by the acts recorded in Judges 11. Second, the author is able to evade the questions of culpability which the Judges account raises by creating an aura of 'individual destiny' and 'honor' around the victim, Jephthah's daughter.

Jephthah and the Lord

In Judg. 11.29 the text reads וַתְּהִי עֲלֵי־יִפְתָּח רוּחַ יְהוָה, 'And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah'.⁴ This phrase is significantly absent from Pseudo-Philo's narrative. If this formula is an indication that what follows is divinely sanctioned, then its omission suggests that Pseudo-Philo rejects this interpretation. Judges goes on: 'Then Jephthah vowed a vow (יָדַר . . . נָדַר) to the Lord (לַיהוָה) and said, 'If truly You give (אִם־נָתַתָּן תֵּתֶנּוּ) the sons of Ammon into my hand (בְּיָדִי) . . . ' (11.30). Jephthah engages in direct discourse with the Lord: he vows *to the Lord* and says, 'if *You* give the Ammonites into *my* hand. . . ' In the corresponding passage in Pseudo-Philo's account, 'Jephthah rose up. . . saying. . . ' Saying to whom? There is no identifiable character to whom Jephthah's words are addressed, unless it be 'all the people' whom he is arming. Furthermore, the narrator does not acknowledge (though the Lord and Jephthah do) that a *vow* has been vowed. Jephthah simply says, 'When the sons of Ammon have been delivered into my hands. . . ' (39.10). Delivered by whom? The narrator employs the passive voice, thereby dissolving the tension set up in Judges between 'If you give' and 'the Lord gave'. Clearly, Pseudo-Philo finds this juxtaposition troubling.

The author recognizes and rejects the implication of Judges. For this reason the Lord, who is a silent agent in the biblical account, becomes an essential and articulate character in Pseudo-Philo's version. Judges does not state explicitly that Jephthah's vow was acceptable to the Lord. But if it were unacceptable, then why were the Ammonites delivered into his hand? And how did Jephthah's daughter come to be the designated victim? Did the Lord desire her for himself? These are the difficulties which the author needs the

Lord to smooth out and nothing short of a divine explanation will do. Thus the Lord speaks his indignation at Jephthah's vow although the reason is not, as expected, that Jephthah was dealing irresponsibly with the lives of his household. Rather the Lord's indignation arises from the possibility that a dog might be offered (39.11).

Pseudo-Philo's gloss on the biblical account is not surprising when we realize that the author has, in the Lord's speech, created a subterfuge whereby the reader is lulled into believing that Jephthah intended a non-human sacrifice as 'the comer-forth that comes forth' (היוצא אשר יצא). In addition, this gloss provides a pretext for the choice of Jephthah's daughter as the sacrificial victim. The author has reworked the passage in order to affirm the daughter's status as a divinely-ordained sacrifice and at the same time to absolve the Lord of her murder. Pseudo-Philo's Lord will have nothing to do with Jephthah's bargaining; the Lord insists: 'I will surely free my people in this time, not because of him but because of the prayer that Israel prayed' (39.11).

Pseudo-Philo has diffused the problems of the Judges story while preserving its fabula intact. Simultaneously the way has been opened for a slightly different (and presumably less problematic) tension and pathos which is developed in the next scene.

Jephthah and His Daughter

The same grammatically constructed distance between the characters occurs at what, in the Judges story, is a point of intense interaction. The Judges account follows:

Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah, and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances; she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And when he saw her he rent his clothes and said 'Alas, my daughter! you have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me; for I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow' (RSV 11.34).

Pseudo-Philo's rendering of this encounter differs strikingly from the biblical version. Upon his return, Jephthah is met by an unspecified number of women (40.1). The succeeding sentence then reveals, 'And it was his only daughter who came out of the house first in the dance. . . ' (40.1). Where in Judges the young woman comes forth alone, in Pseudo-Philo's story, distance as well as suspense is created by the addition of the other women. There is no intimate encounter

between the father and his only daughter; she is one, albeit the first, of many dancers in procession to greet the returning victor. When he sees her, Jephthah does not, as in Judges, perform the tragic gesture of rending his garments: he simply 'grows faint'. Nor does he hurl at her the devastating accusation (in direct discourse), 'you have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble with me (Judg. 11.34).

The Jephthah of Judges claims victimization and remitting anguish. Pseudo-Philo's Jephthah, on the other hand, observes, 'Rightly was your name called Seila, that you might be offered in sacrifice' (40.1), then poses the rhetorical question,

And now who will put my heart in the balance and my soul on the scale? And I will stand by and see which will win out, whether it is the rejoicing that has occurred or the sadness that befalls me. And because I opened my mouth to the Lord in song with vows, I cannot call that back again (40.1).

The daughter of Jephthah is named for the first time but it is not her father who has named her; rather the passive construction indicates that destiny has named her 'Seila, that you might be offered in sacrifice' (40.1). She, like Pseudo-Philo's Isaac, was born to this end (32.3). No one, least of all Seila, is culpable. Likewise, her father's grief is less than all-consuming; he will 'stand by' to see whether 'the rejoicing' or 'the sadness' will 'win out'. Thus, in this passage, as in the preceding one, questions of culpability and victimization are dulled by the author's use of impersonal constructions which blur the interaction between characters.

Seila, for her part, maintains the established distance by returning her rather's rhetorical question with one of her own: 'Who would be sad in death, seeing the people freed?' (4.1). She then invokes an interpretation of the Abraham and Isaac story which Pseudo-Philo refers to in two other places (18.5; 32.2-3) and which is echoed by Josephus in *Ant.* 1.228ff.: 'Or do you not remember the days of our fathers when the father placed the son as holocaust?' (40.2). Thus she interprets the situation and commands her father not to annul 'everything that you have vowed but carry it out' (40.3).

Seila has omitted herself completely from this speech and does not name herself as the object of her father's vow. The daughter of Judges, however, affords us no such distance. She says plainly, 'Do to me (עשה לי). . . now that the Lord has done for you (עשה לך)'. Both the human sacrifice and the parallelism are obscured by

Pseudo-Philo. In addition, at the close of the story, Pseudo-Philo omits the object of sacrifice. In Judges, 'she returned to her father who did with *her* according to his vow. . . ' (11.39); Seila is clearly the victim in Pseudo-Philo's story as well but somehow no one ever does anything *to her*. As a result of Pseudo-Philo's emendations, she is never victimized or objectified. The embarrassment of child sacrifice is removed.

In sum, it is clear how consistently the author of this text has used subtle literary devices to recast the story of Jephthah's daughter and to give it a different set of meanings. Pseudo-Philo begins this process by consistently eliminating intimacy and explicit interaction among the characters and by placing greater emphasis on the 'divinely ordained fate' of Jephthah's daughter.

Seila's Claim, Seila's Lament

Jephthah's words to Seila only serve to reveal to her her chosenness ('Rightly was your name called Seila'). She recognizes that she has no power but that of claiming the sacrifice as her own and articulating her choice.

For I am not sad because I am to die nor does it pain me to give back my soul, but because my father was caught in the snare of his vow; and if I did not offer myself willingly for sacrifice, I fear that my death would not be acceptable or I would lose my life in vain (40.3).

Nowhere in this speech, or in anything that precedes or follows, is there any mention of obedience. Seila does not act in obedience to her father but by her own volition. This response pleases the Lord, who remarks, 'the virgin is wise in contrast to her father and perceptive in contrast to all the wise men who are here. . . and her death will be precious before me always' (40.4). Here, as in 39.11, the author has constructed the narrative in such a way as to reaffirm the acceptability and nobility of Seila's choice.

The preceding speech (40.4) serves as an introduction to Seila's Lament. This lament stands out from the entire *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* as the only full-blown lyrical composition in the collection. In content as well as in form it differs from everything else written by Pseudo-Philo, including the rest of the Jephthah episode. It serves as both a culmination of and response to her father-vow/daughter-sacrifice dynamic set up in the preceding verses. Through

this lament Seila emerges as a tragic heroine of the order of her Greek predecessors Antigone and Iphigenia at Aulis. She too goes to her doom lamenting her fate as a 'bride of death'.⁵

There are a number of textual problems surrounding this section, as well as the rest of the text. I will reserve discussion of some of these textual problems for part 3 and here deal with the structure of the lament and the relation of its basic components to each other and to the whole.

Seila's Lament is ideologically divisible into two parts. The turning point comes with the direct address by Seila to her absent mother in line fifteen. This line stands at the center of a chiasm which structures the entire piece. The lyric begins and ends with the invocations. After the opening invocations Seila refers to her father and insists that her death will not be in vain. The second half begins with an appeal to her mother and the claim that it was 'in vain' that her mother bore her. In each case these statements are followed by references to the marriage chamber, and then to garlands, robes and oil. These latter three elements form the chiasm which links the two halves of the poem.

The lament (see Appendix 1) may be outlined in the following manner:

Invocations: mountains, hills, rocks, (heavens, firmament)

- (a) reference to Father/'not in vain' will my life be taken away
- (b) (no) marriage chamber
- c (no) garlands
- d (no) robes
- e (no) oil

- (a') appeal to Mother/'in vain' have you borne your only daughter
- (b') marriage chamber
- e' oil
- d' robes
- c' garlands (and coverlet)

Invocations: (companions), trees, beasts

I think the thematic division of this composition is fairly clear as outlined above. However, my reasons for referring to an 'ideological' division require further explanation.

An obvious difference between the first and second halves are the opposite yet corresponding references to 'father' and 'mother'. First, in the references themselves a striking imbalance occurs. In the

former, the indefinite article is used, thereby abstracting and depersonalizing the word 'father'. The distance and formality which has marked the story thus far continues here. This impersonal tone stands in sharp contrast to the direct address of line fifteen: 'O Mother, in vain have *you* borne *your* only daughter'.

Second, if we look at the other corresponding verses we find a similar contrast. The objects of Seila's opening invocations (in the 'father' half), the mountains, hills, rocks, etc., are all immutable and lifeless, while those of her final invocations (in the 'mother' half), the trees, beasts, etc. are vital and sentient. They are implored not just to witness, as are the others, but to respond.

Third, the formal/ritual 'wedding garlands', 'clothes', and 'oil' of the first part become personalized and specified in the second. 'Fragrant oil' becomes 'oil that you have prepared for me', 'clothed in splendor' becomes 'the white robe that my mother has woven', and the 'wedding garlands' become 'the crown (garland) of flowers that my nurse plaited for me'. Each item introduced negatively and abstractly in the first half becomes, in the second, the work of a woman with whom Seila shares an intimate bond.

The final contrast is not only the most blatant but the most difficult to understand. In line five, Seila claims that 'not in vain will my life be taken away'. Then, in line fifteen, she seems to contradict herself with the assertion, 'O Mother, in vain have you borne your only daughter'. What is in vain and what is not? The answer is not immediately clear. I think that the meaning of this contrast can only be rendered in terms of the father/mother, formal/intimate dichotomies that function in the text as I have discussed above. The father's realm is the realm of the abstract, the impersonal, the realm where vows are immutable and relations are formal and children are demanded for sacrifice (as in 'the days of our fathers').

In this realm, Seila's death and choice are 'not in vain'; they are logically consistent and 'honorable'. The account of Jephthah's daughter represents an incursion of the 'father' into the realm of a 'virgin daughter' which can signal only one of two things: marriage or death. Eva C. Keuls, Margaret Alexiou and Peter Dronke have demonstrated that, in Hellenistic ideology and practices, the two themes are closely related (1985, 1971). Seila goes to her death as to her marriage bed. She is a 'willing sacrifice' and is thus 'acceptable' as a woman, as a daughter, as a victim. Therefore, 'not in vain will [her] life be taken away'.

But a mother is not a father. With good reason is Seila promised rest 'in the bosom of her mothers' (40.4). This phrase, as far as I know, is unique in literature of this period. Seila may be contrasted to Pseudo-Philo's Deborah who, as a judge and a warrior, lived in the 'fathers' realm' and so was said to 'sleep with her fathers' at her death (33.6).

In the 'mother's realm' formality gives way to intimacy and therefore to shared grief and the recognition that 'in vain have you borne your only daughter': death will replace the intimate embraces of the bridal bed and corrupt the oils and vestments which the women (mother, daughter, nurse) have made. 'Out there', amidst the trees and the beasts, away from the fathers, Seila is able to grieve and to cry 'Mother!'

Pseudo-Philo has fulfilled a number of purposes in Seila's Lament. First, the author has reinforced this character's autonomy and volition by giving her a monologue; her speeches are not confined to responses to another character but allow her to express her thoughts. Second, the lament supplies a reference to the young girl's mother who is conspicuously absent in the Jephthah fabula. In addition, the 'mother' section of the lament provides a response to the distant (and deadly) 'realm of the fathers'.

Thus, Seila's Lament embodies both a sense of the ideological and social constraints that the Judges fabula presumes, namely the immutability of vows, the immanence of God, and the power of a father—divine or otherwise—over the life of his child. At the same time Seila's volition, her autonomy and the appeal to her mother in the lament are a response to that ideology within those constraints. This response takes place primarily on the level of the 'text', that is, through the linguistic structure, and is vital for an understanding of Pseudo-Philo's 'story' and its relation to the Judges narrative.⁶

Interpretation and Translation: The Question of Volition

It is necessary to make a few observations about the relationship between interpretation and translation and the way in which the relationship manifests itself in the Pseudo-Philo translations. As I have noted above, the only power that Seila can have within this fabula is the power to claim the sacrifice as her own and to articulate that claim. She is sacrificing her own life: her father is not a victim, the sacrifice is not his, only the vow and its fulfillment belong to him.

But does Seila really make this claim and exercise power of choice? Or do Jephthah or the Lord wield the real power in this narrative? I have argued that the former is the case. This becomes quite clear through a textual analysis of the interactions between characters. There are several instances in this piece, however, where how one answers these questions determines how one chooses to translate the text. (See appendices for various translations of 40.4-7).

For example, the last line of the Lord's speech concerning Seila reads (where it is not omitted): 'Et nunc detur anima eius in petitione eius, et erit mors eius preciosa ante conspectum meum omni tempore'.⁷ Three translations of this passage follow:

And now let her (eius) life be given at his (eius) request
and her (eius) death will be precious before me always.
(D.J. Harrington 1985: 354)

And now let her (eius) soul be preserved as she (eius) demanded
and her (eius) death will be precious in my sight for all ages.
(M. Alexiou 1971: 822)

And now let her (eius) life be given her at her (eius) request,
and her (eius) death shall be precious in my sight at all times.
(M.R. James 1971: 193)

In Latin the word *eius* can be translated 'his', 'her', or 'its'. Grammatically, any of these meanings is possible in this context, though in Greek or Hebrew the gender would have been clear. Why, if the translator had wanted to differentiate between the three identical words, did he not use *sua* or *suo* to distinguish them as he has done elsewhere, c.f. the conclusion of this quotation: 'et abiens decidet in sinum matrum *suarum*?' It is difficult to justify a translation of the second *eis* as 'his' when the first and third are unquestionably 'her' and no correlatives are provided. Yet this is exactly what the first translator has done. This is one instance in which the answer to the question, 'By whose volition do the events of the story take place?', determines one's translation. To a large degree this question, inasmuch as it involves assumptions concerning gender and family hierarchy, is inescapably ideological.

Furthermore, each of our translators remains ideologically consistent whenever the volition question bears on the translation. A

second instance which illustrates this trend occurs in line eight of Seila's Lament. All of the Latin manuscripts, except those which omit this line, read: 'ut pater non expugnet filiam quam devovit sacrificare, et ut princeps illius unigenitam audiat in sacrificare promissam'. Three translations follow:

That a father did not refuse the daughter whom he had sworn to sacrifice,
that a ruler did not grant that his only daughter be promised for sacrifice.

(D.J. Harrington: 354)

That a father may not overrule the daughter that he has vowed to sacrifice,
And that his Lord hear, an only daughter has been promised in sacrifice.

(M. Alexiou: 823)

That the father overcome not (or fight not against) his daughter whom he hath vowed to offer up,
that her ruler may hear that his only begotten daughter is promised for a sacrifice.

(M.R. James: 193)

The words under consideration are the verb *expugnet*, and its relation to its object, and *audiat*. The first translation differs greatly from the other two; again, the underlying issue is that of volition. Clearly, all three translations take the object of the verb *expugnet* to be *filiam*, 'daughter'. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* offers possibilities such as 'overcome', 'destroy', 'capture', and 'reduce' but the precise meaning of the verb is obscure.

A point of comparison may be found in verse one of this chapter in which the same verb is used to describe Jephthah's victory over the sons of Ammon: 'Et venit Iephta et expugnavit filios Ammon'. Yet, this word is not used in 40.2 in which Seila recounts the exchange between Abraham and Isaac: 'et non contradixit ei', 'and he did not refuse him'. Harrington renders both *contradixit* (40.2) and *expugnet* (40.5) as 'refuse', while translating *expugnavit* (40.1) as 'attacked'. Taking into account the range of nuances of this verb, this translation still presents some difficulties. It loses the sense of Seila's act of will which emerges in her command to her father: 'Do not annul

everything you have vowed but carry it out' (40.3). I believe that her *assent* is referred to in 'ut pater non expugnet filiam'. In this light, Alexiou and James retain a more accurate interpretation of the Latin text.

The same principle of interpretation is applied to the following line: *audiat* is rendered 'granted' by Harrington and 'hear' by Alexiou and James. 'Granted' is a free translation which maintains the sense of the father's volition/act. This choice is consistent with the rest of Harrington's translation and is also consistent with the dominant ideology which places power in the hands of the father and not the daughter. Yet, Seila's autonomy, which is Pseudo-Philo's own innovation and which is embodied by the other two translations, is obscured in Harrington's text. Seila choose to offer herself willingly: the sacrifice is hers, not her father's.

Conclusions

Throughout this study it has been important to bear in mind that narrative takes place on many levels at once. Pseudo-Philo's transformations are effected through changes on both the textual level (grammar, syntax, etc.) and on the story level (additions, omissions). Nevertheless, the fabula has remained recognizable throughout.

It is evident that Pseudo-Philo's concerns were not those of the writer or redactor of Judges. Yet it was important to Pseudo-Philo to retain the tale and to rewrite it as described above. Through a comparative reading of the two texts it is possible to gain a sense of what some of the author's concerns, constraints and assumptions may have been. In order to achieve the desired transformations Pseudo-Philo has (1) created a 'distance' between the characters by means of literary devices, (2) enabled Seila and the Lord to articulate the motives underlying their actions, (3) developed Seila as an autonomous character and (4) supplied a 'mother' (and all that she entails) to the story. Pseudo-Philo has replaced the 'problems' of Judges with more 'palatable' alternatives.

Finally, I have noted that ideological currents similar to those embodied in these ancient texts can and do function in the work of modern critical translation. Assumptions about gender roles affect the translation of the text (whether from one language to another or from narrative to scholarly discourse). Inasmuch as this is so, it is

necessary to recognize that what one brings to the reading: comprehension and translation are as much a part of 'narrative' as the written text itself.

Appendix 1

D.J. Harrington, 'Pseudo-Philo: A New Translation and Introduction', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. II, ed. J.H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 40.4-7.

'... And I have seen that the virgin is wise in contrast to her father and perceptive in contrast to all the wise men who are here. And now let her life be given at his request, and her death will be precious before me always, and she will go away and fall into the bosom of her mothers.'

And when the daughter of Jephthah came to Mount Stelac, she began to weep, and this is her lamentation that she lamented and wept over herself before she departed. And she said,

'Hear, you mountains, my lamentations;
and pay attention, you hills, to the tears of my eyes;
and be witnesses, you rocks, of the weeping of my soul.
Behold how I am put to the test!
But not in vain will my life be taken away.
May my words go forth in the heavens,
and my tears be written in the firmament!
That a father did not refuse the daughter whom he had sworn to
sacrifice,
that a ruler granted that his only daughter be promised for
sacrifice.
But I have not made good on my marriage chamber,
and I have not retrieved my wedding garlands.
For I have not been clothed in splendor while sitting in my
women's chamber,
And I have not used the sweet-smelling ointment,
And my soul has not rejoiced in the oil of anointing that has been
prepared for me.
O Mother, in vain have you borne your only daughter,
because Sheol has become my bridal chamber,
and on earth there is only my woman's chamber.
And may all the blend of oil that you have prepared for me be
poured out,
and the white robe that my mother has woven, the moth will eat
it.
And the crown of flowers that my nurse plaited for me for the
festival, may it wither up;

and the coverlet that she wove of hyacinth and purple in my
 women's chamber, may the worm devour it.
 And may my virgin companions tell of me in sorrow and weep for
 me through the days.
 You trees, bow down your branches and weep over my youth.
 You beasts of the forests, come and bewail my virginity,
 for my years have been cut off
 and the time of my life grown old in darkness.'

Appendix 2

Margaret Alexiou and Peter Dronke, 'The Lament of Jephthah's Daughter: Themes, Traditions, Originality', *Studi Medievali* Sc. 3, 12/2 (1971), pp. 822-23.

'... I have seen her to be wiser than her father, more true in feeling than all who now are wise. And now let her soul be preserved as she demanded, and her death will for all ages be precious in my sight.'

You mountains, hear my lamentation,
 and you hills, watch the tears of my eyes;
 witness, you rocks, the lament of my soul.
 See how I am singled out—
 but let my soul not have been given in vain!
 Let my words mount to the heavens,
 let my tears be written in the sight of the firmament,
 that the father may not overrule the daughter he has vowed to
 sacrifice,
 and that his Lord hear, an only daughter has been promised in
 sacrifice.

But my hunger for my bridal bed has not been quenched,
 nor am I sated with wedding-garlands,
 I have not been dressed in splendour, as befits my birth,
 nor have I used my perfume of musk,
 nor has my soul put forth its leaves, though the oil to anoint my
 body was prepared.

Oh mother, it was in vain you bore your only daughter,
 for hell has become my bridal bed,
 and my unguents will be spilt on the earth
 and all the oil you blended for me wasted,
 and the white dress my mother sewed, the moth will eat it,

and the flowers in the garland my nurse plaited will wither in
time,

and the hyacinth coverlet I wove with my own skill,
and my purple dress, worms will ruin.

And my maiden friends, when they tell of me,
shall weep and groan for me through the days.

You trees, incline your boughs and lament my youth.

Come, forest beasts, and tread on my virginity,
for my years have been cut away,
and the spring of my life will grow old in darkness.

Appendix 3

M.R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (New York: Ktav, 1971), 40.4-7.

'... I have seen that she is more wise than her father, and a maiden of understanding more than all the wise which are here. And now let her life be given her at her request, and her death shall be precious in my sight at all times.

And when the daughter of Jephthah came unto the mount Stelac, she began to lament. And this is her lamentation wherewith she mourned and bewailed herself before she departed, and she said: Hearken, O mountains, to my lamentation, and look, O hills, upon the tears of mine eyes, and be witness, O rocks, in the bewailing of my soul. Behold how I am accursed, but my soul shall not be taken away in vain. Let my words go forth into the heavens, and let my tears be written before the face of the firmament, that the father overcome not (*or* fight not against) his daughter whom he hath vowed to offer up, that her ruler may hear that his only begotten daughter is promised for a sacrifice. Yet I have not been satisfied with my bed of marriage, neither filled with the garlands of my wedding. For I have not been arrayed with brightness, sitting in my maidenhood; I have not used my precious ointment, neither hath my soul enjoyed the oil of anointing which was prepared for me. O my mother, to no purpose hast thou borne thine only begotten, and begotten her upon the earth, for hell is become my marriage-chamber. Let all the mingling of oil which thou has prepared for me be poured out, and the white robe which my mother wove for me, let the moth eat it, and the crown of flowers which my nurse plaited for me aforetime, let it wither, and the coverlet which she wove of violet and purpose for my virginity, let the worm spoil it; and when the virgins, my fellows, tell of me, let them bewail me with groaning for many days. Bow down your branches, O ye trees, and lament my youth. Come, ye beasts of the forest, and trample upon my virginity. For my years are cut off, and the days of my life are waxen old in darkness.

Notes

1. Gary Porton ('Defining Midrash', *The Study of Ancient Judaism*, Vol. I [New York: Ktav, 1981], p. 72), has referred to *LAB* as 'one of the oldest midrashic works in our possession'. It dates from around the first century CE. The language of the original was probably Hebrew though it is only extant in Latin which was translated from a Greek version sometime in the fourth century. Its origin is probably Palestinian. Pseudo-Philo retells a number of biblical stories from Genesis through the death of Saul.

2. Brevard Childs writes, 'midrash is, above all, an interpretation of a canonical text within the context and for the purposes of a community and is not just embellishment of tradition' (Brevard Childs, 'Midrash and the Old Testament', *Understanding the Sacred Text* [Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1972], p. 49).

3. I have found it useful, in my study of these texts, to employ the categories and method outlined by Mieke Bal in her book, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985). *Fabula*, as Bal uses the term, refers to 'a series of logically or chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors'. This is distinguished from the 'story' which is 'a fabula that is presented in a certain manner' (p. 5). Thus Judges and *LAB* share a common fabula but do not tell the same story.

4. Pseudo-Philo did not use the Masoretic Text but the textual differences are not pertinent to my thesis. In this paper all biblical quotations are taken from the Masoretic Text.

5. I refer the reader to Margaret Alexiou and Peter Dronke's study of traditions relevant to Seila's Lament from the Greek dramas of Antigone and Iphegenia through Peter Abelhard's *Planctus Virginum Israel super Filia Iephte Galadite* (Margaret Alexiou and Peter Dronke, 'The Lament of Jephthah's Daughter: Themes, Traditions, Originality', *Studi Medievali* Ser. 3, 12/2 [1971], pp. 819-63).

6. 'Text' is defined as 'a finite, structured whole composed of language signs', (Mieke Bal, *Narratology* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985], p. 5). See note 3 for definitions of 'story' and *fabula*.

7. Many thanks to Winthrop H.K. Dahl for his help with the Latin texts.

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BETWEEN ALTAR AND WONDERING ROCK: TOWARD A FEMINIST PHILOLOGY

Mieke Bal

The book of Judges is an extremely violent book. Murder is, one might suggest, the basic event. As we have seen in the previous chapter, some of these murders have young, innocent women as their victims. The exemplary victim of this series, centrally present in this volume, is Jephthah's daughter, sacrificed by her father in ch. 11. Of her it is said that 'she had known no man' (11.40). In the afterlife of the story, she has become the nameless virgin, precursor of Mary. In this paper, virginity will be explored as a construct, a danger, and a misunderstanding; as a negation, suspension, and transition; as a gift, a ritual, and a taboo. The question to be answered is: what is the meaning of the idea of virginity, and how can philology help—how does it help in practice—to understand the position of Jephthah's daughter?

The underlying question is that of the relation of reading to philology as an academic discipline, narrative, and the politics of gender. An ancient text is an appropriate means by which to explore this question, since the text's very antiquity exemplifies the problem that is central to these relations: that of distance, strangeness, otherness, and the tendency to counter these frightening features with naturalization, normalization, subsumation to the self. This tendency is generally cultural and therefore inherent to reading. As a consequence of this tendency, the almost exclusive possession of the field of biblical scholarship by men entails a limitation of the impact of reading to one class of human beings. The result of this limitation is a systematic distortion of concepts which have a specific, gender-related meaning. Virginity is such a concept. Therefore, the analysis of this concept *in situ*, in a specific text wherein it has a crucial

position, makes a good case for the general point I wish to make about the interest-orientedness of philology. A semiotic approach that replaces the word in its context, and takes into account other signifying systems than the sheer linguistic-historical, is needed. I will argue by the analysis that follows that narratology, anthropology and psychoanalysis are useful to support the evidence provided by an open, feminist philology. The input of other signifying systems can provide the tools for a reconsideration that opens up the text and gives the concept back to those whom it concerns.

Bat-Jephthah and Jephthah: the Daughter's Gift

The victim of a rare case of a fully explicit human sacrifice in the Bible is referred to as 'Jephthah's daughter'. It is arguably because of her namelessness that this character has become, in later rewritings of the story,¹ the secondary character, qualified only as a virgin, obedient and submissive, even 'wise in her submissiveness'.² To name this nameless character is to violate the biblical text. Not to name her is to violate her with the text, endorsing the text's ideological position. Violating the text is justifiable if it serves the purpose of better understanding it. With Gerstein, I feel it is not only acceptable, but necessary, to take some distance from the alienating anonymity of the character without, however, losing sight of the structure of subjectivity that it signifies. Therefore, I will give this woman a name, but a name which stresses her dependence and her state. In order to make her speakable, I will call her what she basically is: Jephthah's daughter, Bath-Jephthah, or, briefer, *Bat*. *Bat-Jephthah versus Jephthah*: the inequality, the dependence, and yet the acknowledgement of her as a full character, resounds in her given name.

Bat's beginning underscores a discrepancy in the narrative status assigned to her. Not only is she nameless; she is unknown and conditionally described. These are characteristics of a certain conception of virginity: firstness, freshness, virtuality. Her firstness is modified by the formulation in Hebrew, where it is expressed in relation to the house of the father, and to separation from it/him.

And Jephthah vowed a vow unto Yahweh and said: if you will deliver/fully deliver the sons of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be, the goer-out of the doors of my house to meet me in returning in peace from the sons of Ammon shall be unto Yahweh and I will offer as a burnt offering (11.30-31).

As a speech-act, the vow is a combination of deal (trade) and promise. The deal concerns a military victory which Jephthah feels unable to accomplish himself. Yahweh's support has been granted to him already; the point of the vow, therefore, is to perform this particular, ritual speech-act. Now, this speech-act, the vow of a precious, personal gift, coming out of the chief's house to meet the victor, has been performed before: in 1.12. Just as Othniel, there, deserves the chief's daughter as a bride, so Yahweh, the real victor, deserves Jephthah's daughter. The speech-act is almost identical in both cases, and so is the situation—a difficult military confrontation which the chief feels unable to manage successfully by himself. The vow ends with a difference: the daughter will be given away not as a bride but as a burnt offering. Object of promise, of trade, of gift and of offering by fire, Bat's position is already delineated before she is even mentioned. It is within this framework that she will be allowed to act.³

Jephthah's vow is superfluous, since 'the spirit of Yahweh' has already come upon him. This superfluity points to a lack of understanding on Jephthah's part. Such a failure at the beginning, therefore, mortgages the vow itself. It is Jephthah's status as a failing focalizer,⁴ as a character who speaks too much and sees too little, who is unable to match speech and action through the mediation of insight, that determines Bat's fate, Jephthah fails to understand that he should refrain from speaking; since the spirit which has come upon him is, paradoxically, physical,⁵ he should have acted upon it. Not satisfied to be an agent of deeds, he wants to know, and, not knowing, he replaces insight with a speech that acts. If his actions are to be killing, his words consistent with them, are to be killing, too. This symmetry is, so to speak, driven home to him.⁶

A ritual in which young women came out of the house to meet the victor seems the most likely background of this vow (cf. Exod. 15.19-21; 1 Sam. 18.6-7). The 'normal' procedure of celebration after victory would have thus involved Jephthah's daughter as a dancing and singing maiden. However, and this is a way to look at Jephthah's 'unconscious' motivations, the insecurity he has just expressed implies that he does *not* consider himself the victor. In fact, by his appeal to Yahweh he has made it impossible for himself to be welcomed as a victor. This contradictory feeling can be seen to motivate his 'error'. His preoccupation with his status as hero and the glimmering awareness that he does not deserve such status, conflict and produce the impasse.

So much for Bat's first presence/absence. How her state is worded, and by whom, is the next question. In the following discussion, I will oppose Bat not to Jephthah but to the narrator. I will analyze the discourse which is more directly devoted to expressing the idea of virginity.

Negation and Denial of Womanhood

In the narrator's discourse, the episode of Bat's sacrifice is closed with the following statement:

and she had not known man.

The narrator does not use the word *bethulah*, traditionally translated as 'virgin[ity]'. He uses the negative formula. This detail raises several questions which, however obvious they seem to me, have not been raised by philologists, since the phrase *seems* linguistically unproblematic. First, we may wonder whether the two expressions are synonyms. Second, the relevance of the phrase as the closure of the account of the tragedy and as a transition to the ensuing ritual must be examined. Third, the meaning and value of the idea it expresses, in its negativity, has to be interpreted. Finally, the use of the phrase on other occasions may be helpful in determining its meaning and function.

Bat herself, in contrast, does use the word *bethulim*, 'virginity' (in the suffixed form *bethulay*):

And she said to her father: let this thing be allowed to me: leave me alone for two months, that I may depart and wander upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity (11.37).

All translations which I consulted render *bethulay* as the direct object of the verb 'to bewail'. Such a translation relies on a conception of virginity that I contend to be alien to the passage's preoccupations. The latter can only be grasped if we realize who the subject of the statement is. The speaker, here, is Bat herself. It is her view of virginity, her focalization that we can expect to encounter. Philological analysis has no problems here; the word means 'simply' virginity, and what virginity means is not questioned. If we do suspend the now common, negative meaning of the word, and use the methods of philology to grasp its meaning in this particular context, we can reach more interesting results.

A first doubt is cast upon the total synonymy of the two expressions ('virgin[ity]' and 'to not know a man') by their frequent juxtaposition in the same sentence. Thus, in 21.12, the wife-hunters

found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young girls, 'virgins' that had not known man by lying with him.

The redundance of this definition of virginity apparently supports the casual translation of one of its components by the whole concept. But why should we assume redundance in the first place? In other cases, it is either the one or the other expression that is used. In 19.24, for example, the old host in Gibeah proposes to the rapists:⁷

Behold, my daughter the 'virgin' (*biti habethulah*) and his 'concubine'; I will bring them out, and humble you them, and do with them what is good unto you.

Why would it be that the plunderers of Jabesh-gilead make such a point of the young women's state of virginity, using the negative phrase, while the host, here, only uses 'virgin' and juxtaposes it to 'concubine'? Again, philologists, feeling that they *know* what these 'self-evident' words mean, fail to raise the question.⁸ However, if virginity in the negative sense were at stake, the juxtaposition of the two women would hardly be commendable. For then, virginity as a special attraction would make the concubine less than acceptable as a trade for her husband's safety.⁹ Lot, for example, offers his daughters in these terms, 'they had not known man'; they are not referred to as *bethulah*. The difference in use, then, suggests that what is offered in Gibeah is two women who are for some reason usable for the particular use required: rape, rather than the valuation of virginity as such. The aspect of the daughter that allows her father to juxtapose her with the 'concubine' who, as the story shows, is a newly wed young woman, is nubility, rather than virginity; she is available, rather than unused.

The expression translated as 'to bewail my virginity' has to be reconsidered in this light. A second argument against the traditional translation and the synonymy of the two expressions, is the syntactical structure of the sentence. Keukens (1982) is the only philological essay I know of wherein this question is raised. He argues that the verb 'to bewail' (*bakah*) can also have a direct object introduced with the particle 'et.¹⁰ This is not the case. The verb *bakah* is used with the particle 'et in comparable cases like Gen.

37.35, Lev. 10.6, and Deut. 21.13. It refers, there, to the verbal expression of complaint. For the intransitive use of the verb as we have it here, the meaning 'to lament', in some absolute sense, is appropriate. Now, the preposition 'al which accompanies the verb here, is one of the most elusive of all Hebrew prepositions. The dictionary I use¹¹ gives at least twenty-eight meanings, one of which is the frequent confusion with 'el, another preposition with twelve meanings. For students with a positivistic agenda like most philologists, this would be enough to reject the dictionary as a source. But the plurivalence of the preposition can also help us to see new possibilities. If philology allows context to decide, our context here has another instance of 'al. In the same speech to her father, Bat uses the expression 'al-heharim, when she asks permission to go 'to the mountains'. This repetition of the preposition before a three-syllable noun produces a 'broken parallelism' (Kugel 1981; Berlin 1985; Alter 1985). With the spatial referent, the preposition refers to *direction*. In many other cases, it implies confrontation. If we combine these two features, we might wonder if the direction 'to the mountains' involves also a confrontation with the mountains. The case under consideration could be modeled upon the first spatial one, transferring to the temporal sphere the same idea: to go 'toward the mountains' in order to be confronted with the solitude in the wilderness, and to lament 'until' or 'toward' some temporal, parallel state. We can try out the hypothesis that *bethulah* expresses the nubile state of the grown-up girl. It is a temporal indication of a phase of life:

Das Wort macht keine Angabe über die Unberührtheit des Mädchen [the word give no clue about the untouched state of the girl], Keukens 1982).

The fact that virginity in the negative sense is clearly an important value for the Israelites, and determines the marriageability of a girl, does not entail the relevance of that feature *for the girl* in this particular instance.

This view is based on a hypothesis concerning the status of young women, fully developed and argued elsewhere (Bal, 1988). If we take it that *bethulah* can refer to a life-phase, we can establish a series of nouns that also indicate a life-phase of the young woman. On the one side, then, there is the noun *na'arah*, young girl, which refers to a phase of near-ripeness just preceding *bethulah*; on the other side, there is the '*almah*, the nubile, mostly already married woman *before*

her first pregnancy. Between 'virgin' and 'young wife' the '*almah*' is the woman already given away, who can still be repudiated; she has not yet proven to be worthy of her new state. As such, it is not a particularly enviable phase. The transition between *na'arah* and '*almah*', between the young woman as property of the father and property of the husband, is a phase of particular insecurity and danger. The young woman who fails to produce children will be the object of contempt, possibly of rejection. No wonder, then, that the transition is feared, rather than looked forward to. In this view, the state of *bethulah* is first and foremost that of a potential object of gift, a subject of insecurity. How will the girl be given, and to whom? How will her next phase, yet unknown to her, end?

If Bat had been given to a human victor, her fate would have been marriage. The phrase that she uses, 'to lament until/toward my nubility', can be imagined as referring to a situation like Achsah's. After the victory, her father gives her to the hero, and the daughter undergoes a transition. It is to this transition that an implicit allusion can be read in Achsah's story. When, after the victory, she is about to join her husband, she comes to her father with a request. Where does she come from? It has been assumed that she came from some safe place where she had been hidden during the dangers of the battle. More likely to me seems the interpretation on the symbolic mode: she comes from a place 'in the mountains', that is, from a phase of transition that prepared her for marriage.

Arnold van Gennep's concept of the rite of passage, and its structural-semiotic elaboration by Turner (1969) come to mind here, as already evoked by Gerstein. Several aspects of the fragment confirm this meaning. The mountains are the wilderness that represents the transition from one life-phase to the next as from one world to the next. They represent the solitude the initiate has to undergo. This is expressed in Bat's request when she asks to be left alone for two months. The solitude is requested and delimited, as can be expected in the case of the rite; it is the conception of what is her 'normal' next phase. Moreover, Bat wishes to bring her friends. Usually, rites of passage are inflicted upon the entire age-group of the community. The friends may be assumed to be her age, to share her state. Both her friends and Bat will be *given away*, given to a man. The ripeness of the young women is going to be distributed by their fathers. They themselves have only power over the ritual that prepares them.

It is often noticed that Bat accepts her father's vow, indeed, encourages him to fulfill it. I venture the suggestion that what critics call her 'wisdom' (Boling 207) may be seen in a different light. The praise of Bat is couched by Lias (quoted by Slotki) in contradictory terms.

no language is sufficient to do justice to the nobleness of this devoted woman. There are *no lamentations*, no reproach. . . (Slotki 258; my italics).

Lament is, precisely, what Bat chooses to use her last months for. This praise displays patriarchal values. Submission is interpreted as wisdom or as devotion to the cause of the nation. The submission cannot be denied. It can be read as slightly cynical if we realize that Bat may have understood her situation well enough to know that protest would be futile. Being narratively circumscribed as the absolute object, she can only act within, not against that position. Knowing that her father owns her, and owes the victor his daughter, she will in any case have to go through the transition that awaits all *bethulahs*. She cannot protest, and neither can Achsah, nor her friends. But she can lament, and that is what she intends to do, in spite of some critics' admiration for her refraining from it.

The question that arises at this point is that of the status of the discourse uttered by this character. Her speech is embedded in narratorial discourse. Would the narrator, who does use the other expression, let his character walk away with her own language that he could then only obediently quote? Of course, this ancient narrative is not a psychological novel, and standards of modern realism cannot be applied to it without anachronistic distortion. I see this differentiation of expressions in relation to the oral background of these texts, acknowledged but seldom exploited by philologists. Just as the formulation of Jephthah's vow is structured according to the standard principles of ritual vows, just so Bat's discourse is modeled on the kind of language applicable to young women in transition. The discourse fragments were part of the culturally available formulae that narrators had at their disposal. It is not even certain that the composer of this text understood the full extent of the meaning of this 'female' language. He knew it was around, and therefore, usable. If this conjecture is acceptable, the phrase, like many others, can be compared to those wandering rocks, glacial tilts that travelled with the ice toward a new and alien world where they

were put to a use foreign to their origin. They were used to form tombs, for example. Out of their original context, understood solely within the new context, yet indestructable—such wandering rocks are like female, ritual language as we have it here.

What we see so far is a confrontation between two different conceptions of 'virginity'—a female and a male one. The one is focalized by the subject of the state; the other represents the owner of the girl, the father. The comparison between the two expressions suggests that a difference in ideology is at stake. Conflating the two expressions in one idea of virginity, as it is seen today, is, then, an act of repression, destruction, of the wandering rock that is a rare and precious leftover of other traditions, adopted without being understood, to be subsequently erased.

Positive Knowledge of Negative Facts

Freud's well-known essay, 'The Taboo of Virginity', opens with an interesting sentence whose pseudo-objective, scientific tone hardly conceals interests similar to Jephthah's:

The demand that a girl shall not bring to her marriage with a particular man any *memory* of sexual relations with another is, indeed, nothing other than the *logical* continuation of the *right* to *exclusive possession* of a woman, which forms the essence of monogamy, the extension of this monopoly over the past (193; my italics).

What is here 'logical' will be 'justifying' in the next sentence. The juridical term 'right' as well as 'monopoly' could do with some irony. But what is most striking is the word 'memory', with its complement 'past' that substantiates it. It reminds us of the biblical expression for virginity from the male perspective: to have known no man.

We are used to interpreting the biblical expression 'to know' (*yada*) as a simple, if euphemistic synonym of sexual intercourse. As we could expect, however, the choice of one expression over its synonymous alternatives is never innocent. When read against Freud's description of the motivation for the valuation of virginity, it is not so much the case that 'to know' means sex, but that sex means 'to know'. The importance of sex is the knowledge which it produces. The loss of innocence is the loss of ignorance, as the story of the paradise of Eden and its loss has taught us.¹² The fact that knowledge—rather than, for example, defilement—is at stake is

consistent with the concern about 'right' and 'monopoly'. This meaning of sex as knowledge is, in the valuation of virginity, extended to the past. Thereby, knowledge becomes memory.

I do not think that the Hebrew expression for sexual intercourse is a euphemism, an expression that softens the crudeness of its content. I think, on the contrary, that it is a specification that sharpens the content. What the expression conveys, as does its extension 'memory', is that the threat of sexual intercourse with someone other than the exclusive possessor, is the knowledge that turns the woman who experiences it into an *other*, an autonomous subject. It is that subjectivity which comes with sexual experience that, apparently, threatens the exclusivity of the possession. But—and this detail deserves special emphasis—the effect of the extension of the monopoly over the past is to conflate the husband with the father. This is a major concern in the book of Judges.

Love at first sight

The second mention of Bat occurs in 11.34. This time she is described, not as the potential but as the actual object of the vow: she is the 'comer-out' of the doors of Jephthah's house to meet him. The verse has, again, philological problems which a broader, semiotic perspective helps to exploit. Slotki (257) translates:

And Jephthah came to Mizpah unto his house, and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances; and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

Soggin (1981) adds an element that deserves some attention: 'she was his only child, *much loved*'. The modifier also appears in a footnote of Slotki's text, where this translation of the word *yehidah* is defended by analogy with the case of Isaac. The argument is revealing. The analogy with Isaac is motivated for Slotki by the existence of Ishmael, the son Abraham already had with Sarah's slave Hagar. Since Abraham already had a son, Slotki argues, Isaac cannot be the only son. Hence, the word *yahid* in Gen. 22.2 (the male form of *yehidah*) cannot mean 'only' but must denote 'a favorite child' (257). Modern logic is called to whitewash an ideologically disturbing message. For it is Yahweh who, in Gen. 22.2, uses the word; in the eyes of the twentieth-century scholar, the bypassing of the older child is dubious; therefore, it is not willingly ascribed to the deity. The

story of Abraham's sons, however, makes the priority of Isaac an obvious issue, and does not allow us to deny the complicity of Yahweh in the rejection of the son who, like Jephthah himself, had no solid legal background.¹³ Isaac is called the only child with a clear purpose—to state that Ishmael does not count.

The philological twist is even more dubious because in Gen. 22.2 the phrase 'the one you love' is added to the modifier *yahid*. There is little reason to expect the pleonastic doubling. On the other hand, the two expressions may very well have an explanatory relation: the son is loved *because* he is the only child. As we know, Abraham had been promised numerous descendents, although he remained childless until a very advanced age. The only son, then, is the only means to fulfill the promise. Thus the 'love' referred to seems closely related to the interest of the history of the patriarch. Indeed, Abraham's status as patriarch, his very being in other words, depends on his son. The son is part of himself. The modern, romantic idea of love is hardly appropriate to express this motivation, although male love may be shaped by it. Being the only son guarantees Isaac the protection the father owes to himself. This is how forms of male love shape male identity through the father's domination.

In Judg. 11.34 the modifier *yehidah* does not receive such a complement. The daughter is bound to the father by interests other than the male line of descent, namely, by possession. As a daughter, she cannot provide the father with sons. Or can she?¹⁴ The modifier 'only' without its complement receives an altogether different meaning. Where it held protection for Isaac, it holds exposure for Bat. She is not simply 'only'; she is alone. The only child, the only one to come out of the doors of the house, the only one to confront the father. No one protects her. God, the beneficiary of the gift, is silent. No mother comes to her rescue. She seeks relief within the constraints of the solitude assigned to her: 'leave me alone', will she reply in the next verse.

The verse poses a second problem to the translators, this one not of the subject's definition but of her sheer delimitation. What they all translate as 'besides *her* he had neither son nor daughter' is literally 'from *him*' or 'besides him'. Slotki gives interpretations by others who argue that Jephthah had adopted other children but that Bat was the only one 'from him' (Kimchi) or even, that he was completely childless; 'from himself' he had no child; the girl was his stepdaughter (Malbim). Soggin casually states:

MT has 'apart from him' but this has to be corrected to *sebirin* (214).

Boling presents the same conjecture, with the addition of an argument, however, slight:¹⁵

which represents a contamination from the preceding *lo*, 'to him' (208).

In the light of so much certainty about what the text *should* rather than what it *could* mean, it seems tempting to explore the possibilities of interpretation of the text as it stands. The unexpected masculine pronoun may be used deliberately, or instead may represent a copyist error of the less innocent kind we call a 'slip'. We have here the most convincing case for the need to appeal to semiotics for the development of a meaningful philology. It is only when we adopt the semiotic possibility of the motivated symptom that a possible copyist error becomes not simply an easy way out of our own impotence.

Firstly, the preposition *men* denotes separation.¹⁶ Separated from him, the narrator writes regretfully, he had no child: no other child or—if we take the separation in the temporal sense, as the one to come—no child left. What seems to be implied then, is the regret over the separation the father has to endure when he gives his daughter away. Reversing the temporal aspect, the separation is experienced as alienation of the self. In the sense of 'beside', a sense that can very well resound simultaneously with the other meaning, the illogical confusion between self and object that the phrase would entail, does no longer sound impossible in view of Freud's essay. The slip—for then it becomes one—betrays the identification, the self-centeredness, the confusion that the next verse is to express explicitly and with pathos.¹⁷

The identification represents the daughter as so much part of the father that he ceases to exist apart from her; her departure severs him from himself. With fewer words, and less awareness, the slip does express an issue similar to, and different from, 'the one you love' in Gen. 22.2. The contamination now is not linguistic but psychological, even if the latter condition informs the former, rather than excluding it. The contamination becomes a figure that wonderfully expresses what is at stake in this encounter. As a *mise en abyme*,¹⁸ it shows us what Freud, in his essay, did not manage to say on the rational, scholarly level, but what he somehow expressed on

the discursive level—the core of virginity. The absolute property of the father, the virgin-daughter does not only belong to him, as a metonymical extension of him; she is part of him, as a synecdochical integration which causes her loss to be the loss of himself. His wholeness, rather than hers, is threatened with loss. As soon as the preposition *men* means not only spatial but also temporal separation,¹⁹ the temporal aspects, introduced in the concept of separation, remind us of the meaning of Bat's request: let me lament until my nubility. It is the separation to come that constitutes the *narrative of virginity* of which Bat's story is the most dramatic representation.

A second feature of the verse that deserves some attention is its visual aspect, implied, though not explicitly mentioned, in the vow itself. The first one to meet Jephthah must, however, be the first he sees. Has this optic dimension a more specific meaning? Is meeting, perhaps, deadly because it involves seeing? Seidenberg (1966-1967) suggests as much, on the basis of another temporal reversal. 'Sacrificing the first you see' (as the title of his essay rephrases the story) becomes 'sacrificing the first you *saw*'. The sacrifice of the daughter ultimately represents for him the renunciation of the mother.²⁰ The replacement of the mother by the daughter, presupposed by this reversal, is in its turn based on the replacement of the daughter by the mother, performed by Freud in order to turn the virgin into the phallic mother. Freudian discourse allows for all these reversals, which it legitimizes by the term *over-determination*. Judges 11.34, however, stresses a more pointed confusion. *Behold*, the oft-used narrative modifier that introduces a shift, or an extension, of focalization, is introduced here at a very specific moment of the narrative. From the moment of the vow forward we have been wondering whom it might concern—we have been 'looking forward' to the meeting of Jephthah and his victim, of vow and fulfillment, of present and future. The clause *wehinne batho* forms one rhythmical unit. Rather than 'behold, his daughter', I would therefore read: behold his daughter! Identifying with the position of the focalizer Jephthah, who has so much interest in the content of the focalization, the reader holds her breath. What is *seen* is, for the time being, none other than *batho*, his-daughter. Father and daughter expressed in one word, the one that, according to Boling, triggers the contamination we have just discussed. Indeed.

Enhanced by the suspense of her slow introduction, and by this pointed word that inserts the visual aspect of the scene, Bat is the

object of vision rather than the subject of the action that follows. Thus read, the following part of the sentence becomes less verbal and more descriptive. *Batho*, his-daughter, comes out to meet him with timbrels and dances. What we behold, then, is of a hero and a virgin, brought together for a celebration. It had been said that the ritual aspect of the dancing maiden could have been foreseen by Jephthah. Maybe he did not foresee it because he did not see a victory ritual but a different one—that of the gift of the daughter. The scene repeats the promise of the gift of Achsah, and represents a rehearsal of the dancing maidens of Shilo, to be captured at the end of the book. What is more, the host of Gibeah will also say: ‘behold my daughter’. What we see is less a victory ritual than a wedding. And as the contamination of ‘him’ and ‘her’ has revealed, it is the wedding that destroys the father. He ‘knows’ that the dance celebrates not him but the real victor, to whom the daughter is due because she will soon enter *bethulah*, be nubile and torn away from him. The ultimate and founding displacement of this scene is the threat of the replacement of the father by the still abstract husband. It has become unavoidable, with the approach of *bethulah*, unless a way is found to avoid it. That avoidance is, at least, what Jephthah is trying hard to bring about.

The text pursues this line of visuality, of the *view* of the daughter:

and it came to pass, when he saw her. . .

The meeting was a spectacle rather than an act, its account a description rather than a narration. The crucial event of the entire vow-and-fulfillment episode, the moment of decision, is inscribed in this verb: when-he-saw-her. No wonder the view makes Jephthah ‘rend his cloths’ in mourning. This symbolic gesture mediates between the two isotopies of the victory-ritual and the wedding. Jephthah is not the first biblical hero to rend his cloths both for death and for non-death, for losing a child to death or to sexuality, maturity, autonomy.²¹ Jephthah’s speech develops the confusion we have seen already:

Alas my daughter, *you* have brought me to kneel, and *you* have become the cause of my undoing. For *I* have opened my mouth unto Yahweh. . .

In the light of the preceding remarks, this ‘blaming the victim’ becomes consistent: he blames her for her willingness to leave him for the real victor, in other words, for reaching *bethulah*. The

meeting between father and daughter becomes a confrontation in time—the confrontation with the transition, with the impossibility of postponement of the gift of the daughter that will destroy the identity of the father.²²

It will indeed, for so many interpreted the lament of the daughter as regret of childlessness. Such an interpretation is, again, based on a conflation of father and daughter. It is a way of taking Jephthah's side. If, indeed, a woman's life received meaning only through motherhood, it is because it is thus that she provides offspring to the father. The father-line is at stake.²³ Within such a system, the daughter can only bring offspring to the father if, like Tamar in Genesis 38, she becomes his bride. The one whose memory will die out is Jephthah, not Bat, as we shall see.

Bath's Survival

We will end this exercise of semiotic philology with an analysis of how the separation 'from him' takes place. The importance of the new interpretation of the departure toward the mountains and toward nubility is confirmed by the repetition, in v. 38, of the ambiguous preposition. Indeed, as if to enhance the goal-orientedness, the narrator now juxtaposes the spatial and the temporal use:

and she departed, she and her companions, and lamented until/
toward her nubility toward the mountains ('*al bethuleyha 'al-heharim*).

The symbolic function of the mountains, the wilderness that spatially symbolizes time, is once again enhanced.

In relation to the results obtained so far, we will now turn to the final sentence of the chapter, and used as we are now to regarding as symptomatic the near-unanimity of the philologists, we will have to challenge again the traditional translation.²⁴ Slotki translates the final sentence as follows (I italicize the words which will be discussed):

and it *was a custom* in Israel, that the *daughters* of Israel went yearly to *lament the daughter* of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

The philologists agree that the noun *ḥok* means 'custom'. My dictionary translates this frequently occurring word in many different ways. We can distinguish two groups of translations: 1) rule,

law, prescription, and 2) duty, task. The difference between the two groups is in the involvement of the subject of action. The difference within the two groups is in the degree of coercion exercised to obtain obedience. Thus, Joseph in Egypt, running the food supplies as well as Pharaoh's finances, establishes the rule (?) or law (?) that one fifth of every gain should be paid to Pharaoh (Gen. 47.26). Between rule and law, there is the relative autonomy of the subject. If the subject accepts the rule for the good of public welfare, then we speak of a rule; if the subject is not consulted but the rule simply enforced, we have a law. 'Custom' is a weaker version of this group: it is a rule by virtue, not of conscious consent, but of a traditionally produced sense of the 'naturalness' of the act. In the second group of translations, the subject is supposed to act herself, not just to give, pay or refrain from action. The duty, again, is enforced, while the task may include the subject's willing collaboration.

Bat's friends, her companions who go with her to the mountains, can be seen as the first generation of 'daughters of Israel' who take it upon themselves to perform the task described in the concluding verse. Members of the coextensive category to which the victim belonged, they conceive of the 'custom' as a task. The translation 'task' enhances their subjective activity, while 'custom' represents them in a more passive role. The noun, 'daughters', in combination with 'Israel' is obviously referring to a social role, based on the familial metaphor.²⁵ Being a 'daughter of Israel', then, means having a specific place in society, a place in relation to the other categories, especially to the fathers. Bat's friends, near-nubile girls like herself, property of their own fathers, *accompany* (are 'companions' to) her, both in the spatial diegetic sense (they go with her) and in the emotional-empathetic sense (they feel, with, for her). The other, subsequent daughters of Israel extend this group further in time.

Translating *hok* as custom, then, is taking it in a rather flat, innocent and passive sense. What is repressed is the *motivation* of the subjects performing the task. The fellow-'virgins' who feel it as their task to perform the ensuing ritual, yearly return to the site of Bat's fatal initiation rite (v. 40). What do they do there? What, in other words, does the ritual consist of, and how does it make sense in relation to Bath's fate? Slotki's translation of the verb in question (*tanah*) by 'to lament', is one of those suspect near-unanimous ones; Boling has 'to mourn'. Soggin, translating 'to commemorate', is the differing one who raised suspicion, and comes exceptionally close.

The verb *tanah* is not the one used earlier in the chapter for 'to lament'. It is, to the contrary, the one that Deborah uses in 5.11 to celebrate Yahweh's righteous actions. There, the translation 'to sing', in the transitive sense of 'to recount for celebration', seems the obvious one. The commentators rightly assume that the occasion in the concluding verse of chapter 11 is hardly appropriate for a cheerful celebration, although it is equally true that the wedding-isotopy in the encounter scene would make the ironic reversal of Bat's initial celebration plausible enough. But we do not want to use the tricky, all-too-slippery concept of irony, so often used defensively.

The verb has as its central feature the speech-act of recounting, in order not to forget. The book of Judges, like the whole endeavour of historiography, is undertaken in order to 'remember' by language—to fixate the history of the people in its beginnings, for deeply patriarchal motivations. *Tanah* is the response to the daughter's sacrifice. Memorialization, a form of afterlife, replaces the life that she had been denied. If interpreted in this manner, the verb *tanah* becomes of central importance both in this particular story and in the book as a whole. We reach here yet another dimension of the concern with memory that was verbalized in Freud's opening paragraph.

The verb 'to remember' is also present in the Hebrew modifier 'male', *zakhar*. Disregarding attempts to relate this word to a form meaning 'penis', the association is telling anyway. The concern with memory is either the original motivation or, at least, part of its actual semantic content. With this word for maleness, the possibility of memorialization, of history, has become, not only a male necessity, but also a male prerogative. Where children receive the name of the father in order to establish the father's memory, the nubile girls of Mizpah and the daughters of Israel provide the anonymous daughter, all prepared for oblivion, the only alternative form of survival. But if writing history has become a male property, oral history can still be a female prerogative. For that is, in my view, the content of the 'task' as one of the Song of Deborah—to perform oral history, the history, in this case, of Bath-Jephthah. If the sons of Israel make history by fighting wars, the daughters of Israel recount the price that such a history requires. What has happened must not be forgotten.

This interpretation is further supported by the particle/preposition *le*. The 'neutral' translation 'to lament the daughter' leaves aside the

twice repeated *le* that introduces the infinitive of the verb and the object of the action. Such neutral renderings are acceptable, but the rules of grammar do not forbid us from enhancing the preposition and giving it meaning. Thus the first *le* becomes 'in order to', with the purpose of; the second, 'for', on behalf of. The daughters went yearly [to the mountains] in order to pay their tribute to Bat, in order to sing, and by singing, to commemorate, on behalf of the daughter. The difference between Slotki's flat translation and mine which enhances the interests of the daughter produces the space between what the text may allow and what modernity has done to it—between the wandering rock and the tombs built with them:

And it was a custom in Israel/and it became a task in Israel/that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament/in order to recount/the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite/on behalf of Bath-Jephthah from Gilead/four days in a year.

Jephthah's slip comes true: he eliminated himself from the survival that befalls his daughter. The daughter separated from him will be the only addressee of the oral history. Born from a 'harlot', killing the 'virgin'-daughter, Jephthah can only return to war, and try again to become a *gibbor*, a hero, replacing by personal might, by 'heroism', the place in history he cannot achieve through the father-line. That is, indeed, what the second half of the Jephthah story is about—the half where no daughter exists.

The critic who suggests Bat's anonymity is a deserved punishment for her submission to the father's desire, instead of protecting herself as was her duty, Seidenberg (1966:55-56) misses the point of the story as it is interpreted here. The daughter cannot but submit, but within the limits assigned to her by patriarchy and the unlimited power over the daughter it assigns to the father, she exploits the possibility left open to her. Using oral history as a cultural means of memorialization, she makes her fellow-virgins feel that solidarity between daughters is a task, an urgent one, that alone can save them from total oblivion. Although she can only be remembered as what she never was allowed to overcome, as Bath-Jephthah, it is she, not the man who does have a proper name, who is made immemorial. She is remembered as she was, in submission to the power of the father, a power over life and death, exclusive possession, which he decided to exercise until death did them part.

I hope it is clear that the readings discussed here—the traditional tendency and the feminist reading proposed—are as radically

separated from each other as Jephthah from his daughter. These characters are, in a sense, exemplary cases of an inevitable separation due to differences of interests, mental and material, between groups of people. It is necessary and good to acknowledge and accept these differences. The goal of feminist scholarship is not to replace one bias with another, and claim the same right to exclusive possession of the text that male scholarship has claimed. It is, on the contrary, the acknowledgement of difference that is feminism's first priority. What is wrong with biblical scholarship is not that its reading are male-oriented, but that they are not recognized *as readings*, hence, that they are put forward as claims to objective truth, positive knowledge, exclusive insight. It is through that claim that the female perspective disappears. And that repression calls for the return of the repressed which tends to present itself as the deadly other, the mortal enemy, only to the extent that the holder of 'truth' clings to a false exclusivity, priority, and positivity. If only readings were seen as what they are, they would be allowed to co-exist, and mutually illuminate each other. But between that paradisiac state of scholarship and the current falsifications stand many obstacles. The wandering rock of Judges can help to tear them down.

Notes

This article presents part of a chapter, in a revised version, of my book *Death and Dissymmetry* (1988).

1. See Sypherd 1948 for an account of the rich traditions around this story, and Alexiou and Dronke (1971) for an analysis of some of these traditions.

2. See Slotki (1980) for a quote to which he subscribes with enthusiasm: 'The pathos of the situation and the readiness of her submission must elicit admiration' (258).

3. The comparison between the story of Bat and that of Achsah works in a way similar to Hanselman's comparison between the story of Deborah and the tale of Aquat. Here like there, the comparison is illuminating both in the similarities and in the differences between the two stories. The one is used as a reading of the other.

4. For this term, which replaces the traditional one of 'point of view', see Bal (1985).

5. This corporeal nature of the 'spirit of Yahweh' is most clearly demonstrated in the case of Samson, whom it allows to slaughter, not to understand. See Bal, 1988, for a fuller account.

6. Some philologists have painstakingly argued that the architecture of the houses in the ancient Middle East allows for the suggestion that Jephthah could have expected an animal to be the first being coming out of his house. This is a typical strand of argumentation that betrays its apologetic character by the sheer effort to prove the hero's innocence. This never really works; Boling (1975: 208) for example, even provides a drawing, but the drawing itself shows the pointedness, in the vow, of the specification 'the doors' of the house. And how can an animal be ascribed the intentionality inherent in the verb 'to meet'?

7. The passage is part of the most horrible scene of the entire Bible: the gang-rape, torture, murder and dismemberment of the innocent, young, nameless woman referred to, but wrongly so (Bal 1988), as a 'concubine'.

8. Even a feminist like Phyllis Tribble simply assumes this, and repeats the traditional renderings of the philologists. She bases her interpretation of the woman of ch. 19 on the 'lowly status' of the concubine, without noticing the contradictions this interpretation entails. See Bal, 1988, for an analysis.

9. The story bears close resemblance to Genesis 19, where Lot offers his two virgin daughters to counter the threat of rape addressed to his male hosts. The type-scene character (Alter 1981) provides an additional argument against the opposition usually read in the pair virgin/concubine.

10. This is not a decisive argument in either direction, since both the accusative construction and the prepositional construction are possible. But it is precisely because both are possible, and the one has always been chosen rather than the other, that I make it my point to try out the other one. This move is part of my strategy of developing a semiotic 'counter-philology'.

11. I use Koehler and Baumgartner, a dictionary which is used less in English-speaking scholarship than BDB (Brown, Driver and Briggs). I prefer it because it retains many of the archaic meanings of key-concepts like 'concubine' and 'prostitute', censored away by BDB.

12. The sexual meaning of the 'tree of knowledge' which is called at other times 'the tree of life', is widely accepted. See the concluding chapter of *Femmes imaginaires* for an analysis. See also Tribble 1978 and Niquist 1986. It is the woman who, in paradise, initiates the acquisition of sexual knowledge. The resulting misery is therefore blamed on her. Any man who requires virginity of his bride, then, can be seen as a new Adam who tries to keep the initiative to himself. For an analysis of the contradictions of Freud's essay, see Jacobus, 1986 and Bal, 1988.

13. At least, in the view predominant in Genesis. It is helpful to realize how much the establishment of 'proper' lineage is the major concern in Genesis, so much so that we must assume it was not self-evident. There are many indications, indeed, that straight patriliney was not a firmly established custom but rather one in process of establishing itself polemically against other systems. See Morgenstern, 1929, 1931, for a list of references in the Bible, and Jay, forthcoming, for an excellent analysis of sacrifice in relation to this transition.

14. Yes she can, is my answer, but this requires a long development that I cannot offer here. See my recent book (Bal 1988), wherein I discuss the conflict between the patrilineal system and the one which I call 'patrilocal' and which others, mistakenly I find, call matriarchal (Morgenstern 1929, 1931).

15. We come to discern different philological 'styles': Cohen uses the rabbis as authorities, Boling gives his own arguments, sometimes slight, sometimes overdoing the case, and Soggin authoritatively *presents* 'corrections', rather than arguing them. Each of these three types of philological argumentation is oriented by specific interests. Apart from the male bias, we can recognize the religious bias of each commentator. Soggin is Roman Catholic, Boling Protestant, and Cohen Jewish.

16. As other passages from his story show, Jephthah is the hero of separation. He leaves his father's house, and later relentlessly separates the fatherline from others, in the famous *shibboleth* episode. See for an interpretation of *shibboleth* as cutting and castrating, Derrida 1986.

17. As we shall see shortly, in the next verse Jephthah bluntly accuses Bat of *his* undoing. A neat example of the confusion our present slip indicates already.

18. For this term, that refers to a mirror-text within the text, see Dällenbach 1977 and Bal 1986: 159-179.

19. In this respect, the preposition receives the same parallel double meaning as the preposition 'al.

20. Renunciation or repression? I opt for the latter. See also Simon 1987.

21. Jacob had the same reaction upon *seeing* what could just as well be the evidence of defloration, but which he took to be proof of Joseph's death—the garment stained with blood.

22. We need an analysis of the relation between the rite of transition in Turner's version and the experience of time. See Bynum (1984) for a critique of Turner's concept of liminality. According to Bynum, the concept is genderbound. The loss of status, status-reversal and status-elevation are only relevant for those who have status in the first place, and who will have access to status after the transition. This cannot hold for women in societies where women have no status. The liminality of women, then, exists only in the view of them held by men.

23. I would have called this the *patriarchal line* if it were not for the crucial difference in precisely this respect, between Genesis and Judges. The patriarchal line that is the central motivation of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis is either absent, or highly problematic in Judges.

24. Parallel to the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' dear to feminist biblical scholars, I am practicing a philology of suspicion, which is a critical metaphilology.

25. Similarly, the 'sons of Israel' who do the fighting in the book are not actual sons of Jacob-Israel.

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